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*Recognition and Romantic Hermeneutics: Hegel and the English
Romantic Tradition*

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Table of Contents

Introduction, 4

1. A discrimination of criticisms..., 5
2. Why “philosophical romanticism”, 13
3. Romantic embodiment, 16
4. Chapter breakdown, 18
5. Methodology, 19

Chapter One, Hegelian Romanticism and the Symbiotic Alterity of Autonomy and Receptivity, 30

1. Introduction, 30
2. Hegel’s conception of recognition in an aesthetic light, 31
3. Hegel’s response to romantic art, 39
4. Hegel and romantic metaphysics, 43
5. Hegel’s aesthetics in the modern context, 51

Chapter Two, Philosophy, Theology and Intellectual Intuition in Coleridge’s Poetics, 65

1. Introduction, 65
2. Coleridge’s philosophical dichotomy, 66
3. Coleridge’s theological escape from aporia, 73
4. Symbol and allegory in Coleridge, 76
5. The deconstruction of allegory and symbol in “Kubla Khan,” 83
6. The antagonists of the imagination in “Kubla Khan,” 87
7. Coleridge’s ‘unhappy consciousness’ in “Frost at Midnight,” 96
8. The aporetic recognition through joy in “Dejection,” 102
9. Recognitive breakdown in “Constancy to an Ideal Object,” 109

Chapter Three, Wordsworth’s Metaphysical Equipose, 120

1. Introduction, 120
2. Wordsworth and romantic metaphysics, 121
3. Wordsworth’s ladder, 132
4. Dialectical criticism of Wordsworth, 139
5. Contingency and embodiment, 143
6. Doubt and embodiment in “Tintern Abbey,” 147
7. “Home” at Grasmere: embodiment, 153
8. The unifying nature of the Wordsworthian symbol, 161
9. Conclusion, 171

Chapter Four, Dialectical Collapse and Post-Romantic Recognition in Shelley, 176

1. Introduction, 176
2. Shelley’s quest for the imagination upon Mont Blanc, 178

3. Visionary alienation in “Alastor,” 187
4. Eschatological projection in “Adonais,” 198
5. Wonder, transfiguration and irony in “The Triumph of Life,” 203

Chapter Five, The Contingent Limits of Romantic Myth Making, 226

1. Introduction, 226
2. The romantic discourse of Wordsworth and Coleridge, 227
3. Shelley’s second-order discourse, 238
4. Embodied scepticism: *Frankenstein*, 245
5. Conclusion, 258

Bibliography, 262

Introduction

In what follows I seek to articulate a romantic hermeneutics, that is, an interpretive approach to texts acknowledged as central to the canon of English Romanticism, that articulates the human relationship to artistic creation, the natural world and metaphysics. Through this methodological approach I hope to integrate philosophy with the study of English Romanticism, and delineate a coherent, inter-disciplinary corpus of intellectual ideas, all of which can be subsumed under the rubric of “Romanticism.” Using this hermeneutical approach, I offer Hegel’s teleological theory as an example of a romantic mythology—that is, a story that attempts to re-integrate the human subject into the natural world whilst at the same time retaining a sense of imaginative autonomy. I offer a reading of Hegel, which combines his social philosophy with his philosophy of art, and integrate the two areas of his work using an expanded understanding of his notion of recognition. What motivates the philosophical approach to English Romanticism, and the use of Hegel as an exemplar of a romantic narrative, is the conviction that the English romantic tradition is philosophically rich in ways not always appreciated by traditional commentary. I posit a connection between seemingly disparate Romanticisms such as those of Wordsworth, Coleridge and the later P.B. Shelley. All of these thinkers and artists present us with varying forms of romantic mythology, each looking to retain a contingent, autonomous subjectivity, whilst retaining a necessary connection to the empirical world. Working on this assumption, I explicate these different romantic narratives, whilst illustrating the structural features common to them all. Central to my thesis is the idea that this philosophical-narratorial template gives the critic a useful hermeneutical reading tool with which to approach texts, which,

whilst subsumed under the generic category of Romanticism, offer contradictory conclusions in their treatment of artistic creation, nature and metaphysics.¹ Of course, this is only one approach amongst many, and as such a romantic hermeneutics, that whilst not exhaustive, hopes to add to the other critical prisms through which Romanticism has been explicated as an aesthetic movement, or a substantive canon of texts.²

I contend that all the major canonical romantic poets covered here approach the problem of philosophical certainty through the romantic ideal that there is an intuitional assent to knowledge through *aesthetics*. Using a Hegelian approach as an interpretive guide is therefore useful in that Hegel endorses art as a way of apprehending philosophical certainty on the one hand, yet on the other places philosophy on a higher interpretive level. This means that in using Hegel we can gain a *double-awareness* of our subject matter; we see the strengths of art in its approximation of philosophical certainty, and we can critique it in terms of its relationship to speculative philosophy, which acts as an alternative narrative for attaining philosophical certainty. I aim to argue in this thesis therefore *that both the romantic poets and Hegel* share a common romantic purpose, which is explored in their romantic mythologies.

1. A discrimination of criticisms...

Hegel's connection to and criticism of Romanticism has previously been acknowledged by thinkers such as A.C. Bradley³, M.H. Abrams and Morse Peckham. For example Abrams famously aligned the dialectical critical school of Yale criticism⁴ with the Hegelian system of dialectics, particularly as it was initially outlined in the *Phenomenology*.

For as Hegel in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* translated the manifold particularities of human and individual history into diverse moments of the transactions between consciousness and its alienated other, so these critics [the Yale school] view the manifold surface particularities of Romantic poems as generated primarily by a single submerged plot: the sustained struggle of the poet's consciousness (operating in the mode often called "imagination") to achieve "autonomy," or absolute independence from that adversary which is not itself—namely, "nature," the world of sensible objects.⁵

Abrams acknowledges the connection between modern dialectical criticism and Hegelian philosophy; however, as with the critics of the Yale school, he fails to bring in the more specific subject of recognition in the *Phenomenology*, or to even mention any connection to Hegel's *Aesthetics* and the implicit teleology of Hegel's *Aesthetics*. In this I hope to advance substantially upon previous Hegelian readings of the subject.

Peckham views Hegel's *Phenomenology* as the epitome of Romanticism, and as exhibiting the tensions inherent in modernity. He further reads the *Phenomenology* as characterising the need for cultural receptivity in order to avoid what he terms an "apocalyptic" form of negative freedom. His reading of the correlating tensions in Hegel's system and the romantic's system is characterised thus:

The problem of what precipitated the cultural alienation [utilised by the Romantics] was most fully worked out by Hegel, whose *Phenomenology* all students of Romanticism, I am now convinced, should read—repeatedly.[...] The *Phenomenology* was at once the profoundest response to the crisis and the profoundest theory of it.⁶

This is a position that I think accurately describes the tensions that plagued both the English Romantics and Hegel, and also concurs with my idea that Hegel is the ultimate romantic thinker. Where Peckham is incorrect in his analysis however, is his contention that Hegel's system was actually *anti-metaphysical*; Peckham not only offers an early "deflationary" reading of Hegel but also reads Hegel *himself* as

deflationary.⁷ Peckham also claims of the tension between subject and object that permeates Romanticism:

...to the Romantic the categories of the object cannot exhaust the attributes of the subject, nor the categories of the subject exhaust the attributes of the object. Rather, subject and object are conceived of as in a condition of irresolvable tension. This is Hegel, and it is, I believe, a more general explanatory formulation which subsumes both Kroeber's notion of Romanticism as commitment to temporal continuity and Adams' notion of Romanticism as an acceptance of change.⁸

Whilst I agree with Peckham that Hegel explores the “irresolvable tension” of subject and object, Peckham is incorrect to assume this was Hegel's *whole* philosophical system. As I show in the next chapter, Hegel *attempts* to find subjective autonomy through his teleological notion of *Spirit*, but remains philosophically bound to the objective world, requiring receptivity to both culture and the physical world. The romantics, and indeed Hegel, helped attune us to this irresolvable tension. Therefore, whilst I disagree with Peckham's overall reading of Hegel's system in the *Phenomenology*, which is not only deflationary, but actually postulates that Hegel himself was a deflationary anti-metaphysical philosopher, I agree with his account of the *Phenomenology* as fully addressing the aporias of the romantics. Hegel's work tackles the philosophical tensions in the work of the romantics, however Hegel himself was a metaphysical thinker who felt he had *succeeded* in transcending the aporias of the romantic poets. Therefore, Abrams and Peckham in their reception of Hegel vacillate between critical positions of absolute *autonomy* and *receptivity*—these are in fact the tensions that I argue drive the romantic corpus of writing, and I will return to them below.

Present romantic criticism, whilst offering undoubted insights into the subject matter, has been more recently predominantly historicist⁹ or has treated the subject in terms of elements that in preceding criticisms were ignored or omitted; for

example Ann Mellor's ironist critique of Abrams' seminal text *Natural Supernaturalism*.¹⁰ I feel that these approaches of criticism are themselves progressivist and dialectical, and as they have progressed have given us a richer understanding of the Romantic movement: Mellor's criticism supplements Abrams' criticism, as Jerome McGann further builds upon and supplements Mellor's *and* Abrams' criticism. This may all seem like basic commonsense; however, if we view criticism as leading us progressively to a better understanding of Romanticism, then the next stage is to supplement McGann's and Marilyn Butler's historicist awareness with a higher form of awareness, or a further *Gestalt* from within which to approach our subject matter. Whilst McGann would argue that this Hegelian approach falls into the trap of Romanticisms' self-representations,¹¹ I believe that in effect, and to pun on A.O. Lovejoy's historicist criticism, there has been hitherto a *discrimination of criticisms*.¹² In responding to these criticisms, as René Wellek responded to Lovejoy's argument, we can see common factors to them all.

For example, critics such as Mellor, whilst critiquing Abrams' lack of use of irony in his work, actually supplement the neo-Hegelian bent in Abrams' secular-theological approach by pointing out the reception in criticism of *absolute infinite negativity*¹³ of poets such as Coleridge and Byron. These differences between different poets are inevitably present, and previous criticism has adequately heightened our awareness of these differences; what it has not done however, has adequately drawn a narrative line under *all* of these Romanticisms. It may of course be contended that there is indeed no need to discern a holistic connection, or a teleological pattern in all of these Romanticisms. However, the useful point in drawing a speculative narrative thread between *some* of these forms of Romanticism is that we develop a new interpretive approach through which to read a number of

these works. This in turn can help us to better understand as critics for example, the apparent nihilistic ambiguity of a poem such as “The Triumph of Life,” in light of Shelley’s philosophical relationship to his predecessors, Wordsworth and Coleridge. Furthermore, although there is an obvious Coleridge-Kant connection and later on George Eliot-young Hegelians connection, I feel poets such as Wordsworth and Shelley can be approached in new and innovative ways if reread philosophically. In short therefore, whilst previous criticism has adumbrated interpretive tensions within Romanticism and its attendant reception, it has not located what I think is a commonly recurring theme, or search, of a number of the romantics, a search for philosophical and intuitional certainty. This search, or as I sometimes term it, *struggle*, is one a number of the romantics shared with Hegel, and consequently a rereading of English Romanticism in a neo-Hegelian light can bear fruitful results.

McGann has indeed correctly acknowledged the Hegelian bent in much romantic criticism, and draws our attention to what he believes are the critical limits of this form of interpretation:

The earliest comprehensive effort to reconcile this root conflict of impulses in Romanticism was made by Hegel in his “Introduction to the Philosophy of Art.” This influential document argued that Romanticism, which is epitomized in the medium of poetry, represented a higher synthesis of two anterior forms of art: The Symbolic and the Classical. This contemplative and spiritual line—indeed, this late Christian view of art—underlies the approach taken by Abrams, as well as the many variants and derivatives which persist in contemporary criticism. Its force as criticism rests in its ability to reconcile conceptually that fundamental conflict of concepts which we have already noted in Romanticism and its scholarship alike.¹⁴

There are two main problems with McGann’s historicist line of argument, which criticises these “Hegelian” forms of criticism as being uncritically absorbed into Romanticism’s own self-representations. Firstly, McGann himself uses a critical vocabulary couched in the self-representations of Romanticism. A phrase like “Its

force as criticism rest in its ability to reconcile conceptually that fundamental conflict of concepts” sounds distinctly Coleridgean itself. It is not a matter for criticism of “reconciling” to use McGann’s (and Coleridge’s critical vocabulary) but more a matter of *encapsulating* the tensions and differences inherent in the romantic project as a whole. Abrams certainly doesn’t *reconcile* the “conflict of concepts” in works such as *Natural Supernaturalism*. In fact, as McGann himself points out, *vis-a-vis* Mellor, Abrams largely ignores a large portion of the movement, such as much of Keats and pretty much all of Byron. The Hegelian line, which I take in this thesis, does however *encapsulate* the differing concepts adumbrated by McGann: the secularised Judaeo-Christian line deployed by Abrams, the subject of romantic irony rehearsed by Mellor and the unaccountable aspects of romantic irony, or the darker aspects of irony and scepticism, outlined by writers such as Kierkegaard, Muecke and Praz.¹⁵ Secondly, Abrams himself also openly acknowledges the dangers of becoming absorbed into historical and ideological representations in his own analysis:

An inveterate under-reading of the textual surface, however, turns readily into a habitual over-reading. The problem is, to what extent do these recent critical perspectives on Wordsworth [those predominantly of the Yale school of criticism] simply bring into visibility what was always, although obscurely, there, and to what extent do they project upon his poems the form of their own prepossessions?¹⁶

Abrams himself recognises the dangers of reading a thinker like Hegel “into” the romantic poets. McGann’s historicist line, based upon the criticism of Heine in *The Romantic School* (1835), is itself supposedly dialectical. His argument is that there is an incomplete take on Romanticism, exemplified in a Lovejoyan sense, by the divergent criticisms of scholars like Mellor, Abrams and Praz that historicism helps to remedy. However, the philosophical approach I’ve adopted argues that the

varying Romanticisms can also be read at times as corresponding aspects of the same philosophical narrative. This does not mean however that one has to subscribe to Hegel's philosophy wholesale; this is the reason for the so-called recent "deflationary" Hegel of thinkers such as Peckham, Robert Pippin and Terry Pinkard. The critic may use Hegel's progressivist dialectical method as a tool for analysis, a tool that enables the reader to better understand the rational kernel of the romantic plot as a whole, whether in a Hegelian formulation of the plot or that of the English romantics.

Marilyn Butler has also been critical of the philosophical perspective; however her criticism is aimed at the more general nature of this approach. She argues that the historicist approach is a more coherent line of enquiry than the philosophical line—whereas I believe that both lines of enquiry are *not mutually exclusive in the first place*. She specifically criticises Wellek for using the philosophical method in his analysis of Romanticism:

Wellek's concern with Romanticism is less heady and intuitive than Bloom's. His is essentially the approach of the philosopher, who is trained to consider his subject's arguments ahistorically, as a series of propositions disinterestedly reaching after truth. [...] Another [solecism of philosophical criticism] is an inclination to take the most coherent expositor of an intellectual position—who for the Romantics might be Hartley, say, or Rousseau, Godwin, Kant or Coleridge—and use his formulation to interpret the work of an entire group of writers. The very existence of a coherent 'Romantic movement' arises perhaps from some such intellectual manoeuvre.¹⁷

This is of course a criticism that could be levelled at my own research, which is an exposition of the British Romantic movement using a Hegelian lens. However, philosophical criticism need not be ahistorical; and indeed Hegelian criticism relies on an historical awareness in order to fulfil its dialectical kernel. Therefore, Butler is firstly wrong in her assumption that philosophical criticism and historical criticism are mutually exclusive. Moreover, the use of a "coherent expositor of an intellectual

position” such as in this case Hegel, to interpret an entire group of writers is a hyperbolic formulation. One may use Kant, Hegel *and* Coleridge as exemplars of varying intellectual positions, at a given time in history, and one is therefore using coherent (or incoherent) but different positions in order to aid criticism in shining light upon particular poetic manoeuvres. Once again, the historicist method and the philosophical method are not mutually exclusive as Butler claims. Stanley Cavell has countered this kind of historicist reasoning by his own defence of combining philosophical methodology and literary criticism of the Romantics:

The fact that these texts do not undertake to quote and refute particular passages from Kant’s writing would not for me be enough to show that, on a reasonable view of argument, they are not in argument with his philosophy. This too depends on what you understand Kant to have accomplished (what you think the name *Kant*, means) and on what you understand to be the cause of the kind of writing in which romantics have expressed themselves.¹⁸

This is closest to my own position in analysing the English Romantics with the aid of Hegel’s philosophy. I also believe that the kind of writing, (or more precisely discourse) in which the “romantics have expressed themselves” partakes in the discourse of thinkers such as Kant and Hegel, even though there was little or no contact between many of the thinkers. The English Romantics were arguing within the same historical and philosophical paradigm as Kant and Hegel, and are engaged in the process, *both* historical and philosophical, of a certain epoch in history. It is therefore presupposed in this thesis that using the philosophical assumptions of a thinker such as Hegel is a legitimate academic line of enquiry, which can help substantially in our understanding of the English romantics.

The English romantics’ reception of philosophy has been adequately charted in previous research¹⁹, and one should remember here that I am not claiming that Wordsworth, Coleridge, or Shelley had a satisfactory knowledge of Hegel, or were

heavily influenced by Hegel's theories. My aim, as I claimed above, is to use the work of Hegel in order to draw a narrative/interpretive connection between a number of canonical romantic poets and to illustrate how their poetic struggle towards gaining intuitional insights broadly matched Hegel's.

2. Why “philosophical romanticism”?

“Philosophical romanticism” is a way of addressing the world, which on the one hand looks towards rejuvenating the experiences and philosophy of the romantics whilst at the same time examining the present world in new and exciting ways. The term denotes a series of contemporary writings by philosophers who are using the techniques of traditional Romanticism, with a view to re-inheriting and re-orienting them towards an analysis of contemporary global society. These writers tend to interrogate issues such as the relationship between aesthetics and philosophy, the individual and society, and humanity's overall adaptation to the dynamics of modernity. This group also adapts traditional romantic concepts such as irony, metaphysics, individualism and imaginative autonomy into a modern context. Key thinkers in this group include Rorty, Cavell, Pippin, Bernstein, Bowie, Eldridge and Beiser.

For the purpose of this thesis I use “philosophical romanticism” in order to reread the English Romantics whilst at the same time approaching their work through the prism of contemporary philosophical criticism. The relationship between the philosophical preoccupations of the romantics and the present has never been so pertinent. According to Bowie:

My contention is, therefore, that it is possible to tell a different story about the relationship of Idealism and early Romanticism to subsequent philosophy, which shows that very few of their concerns have really disappeared from the agenda of philosophy. This is

already evident if one looks at the role of aesthetic theory in the philosophy of the period with contemporary eyes. That Richard Rorty should now regard philosophy as a kind of literature, because he does not think it possible to establish a privileged role in relation to other ways of articulating the world, is not fortuitous. Such a notion has nothing surprising about it for a romantic thinker, and is not alien to Schelling's *STI* [System of Transcendental Philosophy], which sees art as able to show what philosophy cannot say.²⁰

This correlation between the contemporary philosophical scene and the scene of the original romantics is central to my thesis as a whole. The question of whether art is able to say what philosophy cannot say, is also one that becomes more pertinent when we reread English Romanticism with the double awareness enabled by applying Hegel's own philosophical system to the romantic movement towards what I term "aesthetic recognition": a struggle towards an intuitive recognition of themselves within and as part of the external world in and through the medium of art. This raises the question of the relationship between art and philosophy, and is one that is answered differently by Hegel and the romantics, even though both experience the same philosophical tensions. Bowie goes on to write of the philosophical tensions experienced by romantics and idealists:

There is, then, an essential tension in Idealist and Romantic thought which resides in the uneasy *coexistence* of the (Idealist) desire to be able to *say* what it is in thinking that is unlimited, with an accompanying (Romantic) sense of the impossibility of saying it, an impossibility which seems to make the philosophical enterprise of grasping the absolute itself questionable. The Romantic attachment to art can be seen as deriving from an awareness of the need to respond to this tension.²¹

As Bowie claims, Richard Rorty, as a philosophical romantic, has stressed a new trend in modern thought towards the use of literature in saying what cannot be said in philosophy, as has Cavell and, even if from a Marxist perspective, has Terry Eagleton.²²

Interestingly however, the English romantics also responded to this tension in different ways as a sub-group of writers. For example, Wordsworth's response was very different from that of Shelley and Coleridge, although it was premised upon the same philosophical recognitive search for an absolute intuition or *aesthetic aesthesis*. Wordsworth expresses the idealist desire to "say what it is in thinking that is unlimited" through the vehicle of his poetry—whereas Coleridge and Shelley both respond to the same tension with a stronger negativity, or *infinite absolute negativity*. Wordsworth, I contend, is much closer to the Hegelian position than Coleridge or Shelley—however his response is aesthetic whereas Hegel's is philosophical.

Other areas of interest in more recent philosophical romanticism are *imaginative autonomy* and *receptivity*—two areas which are also key to my thesis as a whole—and areas which I believe are perhaps more accurate in analysing the aporias inherent in romantic philosophy than a simple subject/object distinction. Nikolas Kompridis has said of the impetus towards receptivity in modern philosophical romanticism:

For philosophical romantics, thinking about receptivity in this way [letting oneself be determined by extant present actualities] also invites a reconsideration of our inherited conceptions of agency. The more we emphasise the positive role of receptivity, the more we stress the embodied nature of human agency, and its historical and cultural dependencies, the less likely are we to make mistake mastery for agency. We will come to see agency as a matter of what we let ourselves be affected by rather than a matter of exercising control over what we encounter.²³

This sense of receptivity, or letting oneself be determined is indeed central to my own reading of a number of examples of English Romanticism, and also ties in with a gradual orientation towards *embodiment* that I also argue is implicit in the struggle towards *aesthetic recognition* of some of the English romantics. This struggle for

recognition takes a different form for Hegel, in both his social and aesthetic theories, but I argue corporeality is central to both. Thus, rereading both Hegel and a number of the English romantics through the prism of philosophical romanticism not only gives us a shared sense of their mutual bent towards an absolute intuition, but also a strong sense of their unconscious reliance upon receptivity to the external world and to the body. As my thesis progresses, the phenomenological relationship to the body of the poet's romantic imagination becomes more distinct, and what I term the 'romantic fantasy of disembodiment' comes to the fore. This tension between romantic imaginative autonomy and receptivity is a key driving factor behind the tensions alluded to by Bowie, and one that is now openly not only acknowledged, but embraced by modern philosophical romantics such as Kompridis, Seel and Kolb.²⁴

3. Romantic embodiment

The sense of receptivity and embodiment in traditional Romanticism and idealism, more discernible upon reflection through the prism of philosophical romanticism, has also been examined by Jay Bernstein, in his analysis of perhaps the idealist *par excellence*: Fichte. He has recently introduced materialism into Fichte's philosophy of right and programme of mutual recognition, emblematised by the notion of the *summons*. In so doing, Bernstein is also enabling us to take the first step in re-approaching idealism in terms of embodiment:

...to posit oneself as one among others presupposes being an embodied being among other embodied beings who can mutually influence one another casually and intentionally. Self-consciousness is thus just as much inter-bodily as intersubjectively constituted.²⁵

These philosophical "embodied recognitions," although touched upon by thinkers such as Hegel and Fichte, were as such not really acknowledged as they ran counter

to the self-representations of idealist philosophy. However, through the critical prism of philosophical romanticism, we can read these tensions in the overall idealist philosophical programme, as we can read parallel tensions in the work of the romantic poets.

Moreover, and more specifically in terms of Hegelian idealism, writers such as Stephen Houlgate have also pointed to the implicit materialism in which his idealism abounds. When writing about Hegel's *Philosophy of Nature* Houlgate claims:

For Hegel, the self that feels itself in sensibility is the very one that in humans produces an abstract conception of itself: the “sentient self” is *itself* “that which in spirit is the I” (*was im Geiste das Ich ist*). This means that, since sensation is necessarily embodied, human consciousness, thought and spirit—in their very freedom and autonomy—must also be embodied. The human capacity to abstract in thought from its body and its immediate sensations and let itself be guided by reason must itself be rooted *in* and made possible *by* our organic, animal body.²⁶

Houlgate goes on to examine Hegel's ideas on thought as our ultimate instantiation of autonomy, and the correspondent realisation of a symbiotic relationship to our sensuous body in order to enter into the conceptualisations of thought; or in short, the requirement of organic embodiment and receptivity:

Thought also understands itself to be *fully* free and self-determining: it knows that its fundamental logical categories are generated spontaneously by itself (and not abstracted from sensuous experience), and it knows that the way to discover the truth about things in the world is not through observation alone but through its own autonomous rational activity. In its most sophisticated form, however, thought is also aware that, even when it is silent and inward, its consummate freedom is dependent upon names and thus, ultimately, on the ability to use *spoken* signs: it knows that “we *think* in names.” Such thought understands, therefore, that it is fully free, self-determining, *embodied* thought. Consequently, it realises that its concepts serve to clarify and render comprehensible what is given in sensation and intuition, that its free rational activity thus requires the aid of imagination and memory, and, indeed, that such activity is made possible by the organic structure of the human body.²⁷

Any free and rational thought will ultimately remain dependent upon receptivity to the organic human body and *a fortiori* the organic world at large. Therefore, whilst discussing the Romanticism of Hegel and the English romantics I will keep as a presupposition in my thesis an acknowledgment of what I term the *symbiotic alterity*²⁸ of imaginative autonomy and receptivity to the external world; one which at times these romantic thinkers will attempt to transcend, either through poetic disclosures of being or through speculative idealism, and at times displace into other forms such as organicism or absolute idealism. A lack of awareness (or acknowledgement) of this *symbiotic alterity* of receptivity and autonomy is what leads Coleridge to his despair in canonical poems such as “Dejection” and “Constancy,” whilst a partial acknowledgement leads P.B. Shelley from the visionary hope and despair of “Alastor” to the autonomous hope of “Adonais” and the final breakdown of “The Triumph of Life.”

In the concluding chapter I argue for the *displaced* role of corporeal embodiment in Romanticism, arguing from a hermeneutical-phenomenological perspective that romantics such as Hegel, Coleridge, Wordsworth and P.B. Shelley develop narratives based upon romantic mythologies of *disembodiment*. However, we gain a deepened critical appreciation of these narratives when reread in terms of the relationship between the mind and corporeality.

4. Chapter breakdown

The thesis is broken down into five chapters. The first chapter explores in detail the relationship between Hegel, his theory of recognition and Romanticism as a theory, especially German Romanticism. I examine Hegel’s theory of recognition in terms of a vacillation between receptivity and imaginative autonomy, before showing how Hegel’s philosophy remains within the *symbiotic alterity* of receptivity and

autonomy. I go on to argue that this same *symbiotic alterity* is at work in, and is the driving creative force of, romantic aesthetics. In Chapter Two I examine four canonical works of Coleridge, and show how Coleridge attempts imaginative autonomy, only to finally realise, by the time of his poem “Constancy to an Ideal Object”, the futility of this attempt, and the requirement of receptivity to external processes. In Chapter Three I examine the work of Wordsworth, and show how Wordsworth uses an aesthetic approach to the Hegelian movement toward *Absolute Spirit*. I also describe what I term Wordsworth’s own *organic concrete universal* conceptualisation of the universe, arrived at through the medium of aesthetics—as opposed to reason in the case of Hegel’s *concrete universal*. Chapter Four examines both the early and latter work of P.B. Shelley and elaborates upon Shelley’s own philosophical struggle to go beyond the organicism of Wordsworth to a state of *pure imaginative autonomy*. This progress is traced from “Alastor” through to “The Triumph of life” by which time Shelley fully realises the inability of the romantic imagination to transcend the contingency and historicity of the world, and leads to Shelley’s own aporetic experience of romantic irony. In Chapter Five I examine the ironist state of romantic knowledge, reached by P.B. Shelley and opposed to the romantic metaphysics of Wordsworth and Coleridge. Read from the standpoint of contemporary philosophical romanticism, I argue that the contingent and ultimately embodied nature of knowledge is further explored and critiqued by Mary Shelley, in her novel *Frankenstein*.

5. Methodology

The main body of this thesis attempts to offer a philosophical mode of interpretation, opting for a neo-Hegelian rubric through which to reread some major English

Romantic works. This however does not mean that the thesis argues for a *supersession* of existing approaches, rather it seeks to compliment these approaches by offering a distinct framework that draws upon philosophical romanticism. The proposed philosophical romantic reading is one among the other “discrimination of criticisms.”

Further, it is important to acknowledge that Hegel is an enormously complex philosopher whose legacy is contested.²⁹ With respect to the argument presented here, it is worth noting that in the *Science of Logic* (1812-1816) the dialectical nature of reason arguably places a higher emphasis on an autonomy of pure spirit which is by no means as receptive as it appears in *The Phenomenology*. For example, Hegel writes in the first preface to the *Logic*:

In this fashion have I tried to portray *consciousness* in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Consciousness is spirit as a concrete, self-aware knowledge—to be sure, a knowledge bound to externality, but the progression of this subject matter, like the development of all natural and spiritual life, rests exclusively on the nature of the *pure essentialities* that constitute the content of the logic. Consciousness, as spirit which on the way of manifesting itself frees itself from its immediacy and external concretion, attains to the pure knowledge that takes these same pure essentialities for its subject matter as they are in and for themselves. They are pure thoughts, spirit that thinks its essence. Their self-movement is their spiritual life and is that through which science constitutes itself, and of which it is the exposition.³⁰

One can see this as an instance of a philosophical movement away from the receptivity to the historical world and the timeliness of culture, which can be found in the *Phenomenology* and which I emphasise on my reading, arguing against an essentialist conception of autonomy which parallels the romantic fantasy of disembodiment, and outlining instead a movement between receptivity and autonomy. This is a tension which be found in Hegel’s own thought, and as Bowie argues, is never fully resolved by Hegel himself:

We are therefore left with a tension, which has influenced Hegel's effect on modern thought ever since, between his radically modern sense of thought as being reliant solely on our social practices and their intersubjective justification, rather than on some immediate form of empirical access to the truth, and his systematic urge, which points back to earlier forms of metaphysics as the expression of the *universalia ante rem*.³¹

Further contradictions and developments in Hegel's actual use of recognition as a tool in his overall philosophical system have also been indicated by Axel Honneth. In appropriating Hegel's model of mutual recognition (*Anerkennung*) for a dynamic, modern ethical theory, Honneth outlines how Hegel's theory of recognition mutates from an Aristotelian conception only to be superseded by a theory of consciousness that subsumes intersubjectively negotiated human relations beneath the *Ousia* of *Spirit*, thus fundamentally changing the structure of Hegel's romantic "plot."

Hegel no longer uses it [nature] to designate the constitution of reality as a whole, but only of the realm of reality that is opposed to spirit as its other—that is, prehuman, physical nature. Of course, at the same time that the concept of nature was thus restricted, the category 'spirit' or that of 'consciousness' increasingly took over the task of characterizing exactly that structural principle according to which the social lifeworld is demarcated from natural reality. Here, for the first time, the sphere of ethical life is thus freed up for the categorical definitions and distinctions that are taken from the process of Spirit's reflection. The place occupied by Aristotelian natural teleology, which still had a complete hold on the *System of Ethical Life*, gradually comes to be taken by a philosophical theory of consciousness.³²

Hegel of course clings to his central ideal of the ethical construction of the state, however his theory has moved from a naturalistic-communitarian theory to a metaphysical-ethical theory. This also illustrates a Hegelian vacillation between a deeper receptivity to 'natural' processes and teleology and an attempt to transcend these with the metaphysical architectonic of *Absolute Spirit*.

These actual contradictions, as stated, are inherent in both the *oeuvre* of Hegel and the English romantics, and actually go some way towards substantiating my thesis that there is at times a *play* at work in these various romantic "plots" between

receptivity and autonomy. Crucially, neither Hegel nor the romantics can “fix” this dialectical issue so to speak, but utilise different conceptual apparatus to deal with this problematic, and have therefore many complexities in their overall corpus, which transpire partly as a logical outcome of a broader vacillation between receptivity and autonomy.

As for vacillations in the work of the romantic poets discussed here, I acknowledge in Chapter Five for example, that Wordsworth’s own large *oeuvre* countenances a much darker metaphysical doubt in works such as the five “Lucy” poems. Additionally, political vacillations in Wordsworth are encountered in the *earlier* versions of *The Salisbury Plain* poems (1795) or on an imaginative and personal note in “Elegiac stanzas: suggested by a picture of Peele Castle, in a storm, painted by Sir George Beaumont” (1807). Further, the series of *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* (1822) also displays a much more orthodox political and religious bent, similar to the religious switch to Trinitarianism of the older Coleridge, discussed in Chapter Three.³³

Furthermore, the poems I have selected aptly illustrate the philosophical problematic with which my thesis is concerned, and given their centrality to the canons of the poets concerned, serve their purpose as exemplary texts. This once again *does not mean* that all of the poems of these poets address this philosophical issue, but that there is evidence for this engagement in poems central to the canons of the respective poets. Moreover, other poems within the respective *oeuvre* of each poet are not implicitly weaker upon my reading, in not dealing with these philosophical issues; I offer these poems as examples of a particularised philosophical discourse that I argue permeates central areas of English Romanticism—however this is not a unitary definition of the multifarious term

“English Romanticism.” This philosophical aspect of Romanticism is one that is a single problematic that does not necessarily run through all of the various romanticisms, but which at certain times seems central to the work of a number of key romantic thinkers. Further research in this vein would possibly be beneficial in addressing the work of the other of the “big six” English romantics, Blake, Keats and Byron, and may of course yield far different results.³⁴

The editions of the poems I have used are the editions as cited in scholarly volumes, and I have not chosen to note any variant versions unless they affect the philosophical reading, for which I use each poem as an illustrative example. For example, when reading Coleridge’s “Dejection: An Ode” I have used the two-volume Bollingen variorum text edited by J.C.C. Mays (2001) partly because of the revisions the poet made to the text between 1802 and 1817. However, I have once again only noted any changes that bear light on my philosophical reading, or that help to illustrate what I argue are Coleridge’s recognitive displacements in the poem, such as those between Wordsworth (Edmund) and Sara, who both function in a philosophical sense for the hopes of Coleridge the poet. I have used this series for all of the Coleridge poems quoted here and also for the *Biographia Literaria*.

Wordsworth’s *Prelude* has its own editorial and philological challenges, and there are actually 17 manuscripts in the Wordsworth library at Grasmere. Having examined variant texts, including earlier fragments such as MS JJ, I have found again that the philosophical reading still holds weight, although it is clear that by the first published version of MS E in 1850, (wherein there are also over 60 changes exercised by his executors) Wordsworth was avowedly a more conservative thinker, and that the earlier versions more clearly reflect his nascent philosophical considerations and his dialogues, metaphysical, personal and political, with

Coleridge. This is the reason for my selection of the earlier two-book and thirteen book versions of the poem. For all of my readings of Wordsworth I have used the new three-volume Cornell edition of Wordsworth's poems, (taken from the 21-volume Cornell edition), edited by Jared Curtis: *The Poems of William Wordsworth: Collected Reading Texts from the Cornell Wordsworth* (2008-09).

The generally accepted scholarly edition of Shelley's poetry is the current four volume edition edited by Kelvin Everest et al., the most recent volume of this edition was *Volume Three*, published in 2011. This volume covers Shelley's work up until the autumn of 1820. Unfortunately, the final volume (the forthcoming *Volume Four*) contains both "Adonais" and "The Triumph of Life," composed in 1821 and 1822 respectively. For the following scholarly reasons I have therefore used *The Norton Critical Edition* (2002), edited by Donald Reiman and Neil Fraistat for the texts of these two poems.

Firstly, there is no surviving fair-copy MS of Adonais. There is available the first edition, of what Shelley wrote to Ollier "is beautifully printed, & what is of more consequence, correctly..."³⁵ furthermore, there is Mary Shelley's version of 1839, that contains 3 minor verbal changes at lines: 72, 143 and 252. The version in the Norton Critical Edition incorporates these three minor (1839) changes, which again do not affect my philosophical reading of the text.

With regards to the more complex debate regarding the extant MS of "The Triumph of Life" in the Bodleian Library, Donald Reiman engaged in a major discussion of the efficacy of different readings of the MS in 1960/1965 with G.M. Matthews. Matthews published a newly authoritative version in *Studia Neophilologica*, 32:2 (1960): pp. 270-309. The version in the *Critical Edition* is taken from Reiman's (1965) version, revised in light of editorial discussions with

Matthews himself in 1967 and more importantly a joint analysis of the text by Reiman and Matthews at the Bodleian library in August 1971. There was also later scholarly work incorporated by Donald and Helene Reiman in 1986. This is therefore presently recognized as the most authoritative version, and is the version from the Norton text that I have used for my own analysis.

These readings hopefully bear fruit in light of their own philosophical basis, in comparison to more philologically literary-critical approaches.³⁶ My hope is that the use of this philosophical methodology will bear fruits for future scholars of Romanticism, and help extend the already expanding and interdisciplinary area of “philosophical Romanticism,” whilst using a neo-Hegelian praxis in which to frame fruitful and adventitious readings of English Romanticism. Finally, reading the poems as instances of a wider philosophical praxis, one which perhaps the poets were not even themselves conscious of (one remembers here Hegel’s own famous comment on the owl of Minerva flying at dusk; or perhaps his maxim that every man is a child of his time) but which we can see more clearly retrospectively does not preclude other readings that view the poems as a dialogue for example between Wordsworth and Coleridge on their own poetic and personal experiences, or their relationship to the French Revolution. These variant readings may indeed sit comfortably with the idea of a dialectical praxis operating at a philosophical level and one that perhaps, as “children of their time,” the poets were not directly conscious of.

Notes

1. See for example the work discussed below by critics such as Mellor, Abrams and Praz, whereby different senses of the term Romanticism come to the surface and tend to problematise a unitary theory of the subject. Mellor for example, concentrates on ironic aspects of the subject, in books such as *English Romantic Irony* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), whereas Abrams provides a more unified, secular-Judaic narratorial reading in *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971). Praz however, concentrates on darker aspects of the subject in *The Romantic Agony* (London: Oxford Paperbacks, 1978).
2. I must acknowledge the importance of the different critical (and philosophical) reception of Romanticism which is facilitated when using the “close reading” methodology engaged in for example by critics such as Simon Jarvis and Keston Sutherland, which provide enlightening philosophical readings. Additionally, the close reading work of Michael O’Neil and Nancy Moore Goslee opens up space for additional interpretation of the work of the romantics. The methodology I have employed in this research relies on scholarly publications, without employing the close analysis of variant manuscripts and notebook versions.

My own approach aims to examine these poems as instances of various romantic mythologies or plots; other such “plots” being those of Hegel and, upon my reading of autonomy and receptivity, thinkers such as Kant. For examples of close textual readings of Wordsworth see Keston Sutherland, “Happiness in Writing,” *World Picture 3: Happiness*, Summer, 2009: (www.worldpicturejournal.com) and Simon Jarvis, *Wordsworth’s Philosophic Song* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). For examples of close readings of Shelley see Nancy Moore Goslee, “Dispersing Emily: Drafting as Plot in *Epipsychidion*,” *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 42, (1993): pp. 104-19 and Michael O’Neil, “Shelley’s Lyric Art,” in P.B. Shelley, *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose A Norton Critical Edition*, 2nd edition, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (New York: Norton, 2002).

3. A.C. Bradley’s essay on Wordsworth is generally regarded as the first Hegelian reading of Wordsworth, see “Wordsworth” in *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1909).
4. By the Yale school of criticism I include the seminal Yale critics Bloom, de Man and Hartman.
5. M.H. Abrams, *The Correspondent Breeze: Essays in English Romanticism* (New York: Norton, 1964), pp. 151-52.
6. Morse Peckham, “On Romanticism: Introduction,” *Studies in Romanticism*, 9:4 (1970: Fall), p. 218.
7. “Deflationary” readings of Hegel are readings or uses of Hegel’s work that remove the metaphysical basis of Hegel’s thought, in order to re-apply it to a contemporary context. Most recently, deflationary readings of Hegel have been offered by Pippin, Brandom and Pinkard. Peckham’s reading of Hegel is also deflationary, in fact more so; Peckham actually reads the *actual historical* Hegel himself as constructing a system that whilst demonstrating how metaphysical systems are constructed, (and in so doing preceding modern transcendental phenomenology) is objectively anti-metaphysical.

8. Peckham, p. 219.
9. In particular, two important examples of the new-historicist take on Romanticism are Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background 1760-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) and for a more theoretical discussion: Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983).
10. See above, Mellor, *English Romantic Irony*.
11. Central to McGann's thesis in *The Romantic Ideology* is the idea that criticism of the romantics has itself fallen into the self-representations of the romantics and has therefore operated without an acute historicist awareness that would provide the criticism with a more objective and critical stance, rather than duplicating the ideological assumptions of the original romantics. The methodology of "philosophical romanticism" would not therefore sit well with McGann's historicist approach.
12. Lovejoy famously wrote his article on the discriminations of Romanticisms as a historicist critique of the critical attempts to formulate a unified theory of Romanticism. Wellek famously responded to this with a theory of Romanticism that argued for common characteristics such as symbol, myth and pastoral imagery common to all Romanticism. See A.O. Lovejoy "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms" *PMLA*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (Jun., 1924): pp. 229-253 and R. Wellek "The Concept of "Romanticism" in Literary History II. The Unity of European Romanticism." *Comparative Literature*, Vol.1, no.2 (Spring, 1949): pp. 147-172.
13. Mellor actually writes in *English Romantic Irony* "Most modern commentators on irony have ignored the enthusiastic creativity inherent in Schlegel's concept of romantic irony. Perhaps they have been overly influenced by Hegel's description of irony as "infinite absolute negativity," which Kierkegaard endorsed in *The Concept of Irony* (1841). [...] Even D.C. Muecke's excellent analysis of romantic irony in *The Compass of Irony* subtly shifts the emotional emphasis of Schlegel's concept from celebration to desperation." p. 23.
14. McGann, p. 32.
15. See McGann's discussion of these differing critical conceptualisations of Romanticism on pp. 21-31 of *The Romantic Ideology*.
16. Abrams, p. 155.
17. Butler, p. 185.
18. Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 29.
19. Previous studies of the canonical British romantic reception of philosophy, (particularly German idealism) have included, on Wordsworth's knowledge of philosophy, both Continental and British: Melvin Rader, *Wordsworth: A Philosophical Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967) and for detailed speculations on Wordsworth's connection to Schelling's idealism, E.D. Hirsch, *Wordsworth and Schelling" a typological study of Romanticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960). Eldridge also discusses philosophical influences in Wordsworth in "Internal Transcendentalism: Wordsworth and a "New Condition of Philosophy" in *The Persistence of Romanticism: Essays in Philosophy and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press, 2001), pp. 102-126. Simon Jarvis also offers a stimulating philosophical account of Wordsworth's major work in *Wordsworth's Philosophic Song* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Amongst the numerous accounts of Coleridge's reception of German idealism see, Bishop C. Hunt, Jr., "Coleridge and the Endeavour of Philosophy" *PMLA*, Vol. 91, No. 5, (Oct., 1976): pp. 829-839, Thomas McFarland, "A Complex Dialogue: Coleridge's Doctrine of Polarity and its European Contexts" in Walter B. Crawford, (ed.) *Reading Coleridge: Approaches and Applications* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1979), and Jonathan Wordsworth, "The Infinite I AM: Coleridge and the Ascent of Being," in Richard Gravil, Lucy Newlyn and Nicholas Roe (ed.) *Coleridge's Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 22-52. For a more detailed discussion of Coleridge's relationship to Kant and Schelling see, Tim Milnes, "Through the Looking Glass: Coleridge and Post-Kantian Philosophy," *Comparative Literature*, Fall, 1999: pp. 125-147. Coleridge's relationship to Hegel is discussed in Ayon Roy, "The Spectre of Hegel in Coleridge's Biographia Literaria," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, April, 2007: pp. 279-304. For detailed biographical discussion of P.B. Shelley's reception of philosophy throughout his career see the excellent biography, Richard Holmes, *Shelley: The Pursuit* (London: Harper Collins, 1974). For a good discussion of philosophical influences, including materialism, empiricism and neoplatonism on "Mont Blanc" see I.J. Kapstein, "The Meaning of Shelley's 'Mont Blanc,'" *PMLA*, Vol. 62, No. 4 (Dec., 1947): pp. 1046-1060. Further discussion of general philosophical influences on Shelley can be found in Frederick L. Jones, "Shelley's 'On Life,'" *PMLA*, vol. 62, No. 3 (Sep., 1947): pp. 774-783, and Earl Wasserman "Speculations on Metaphysics: The Intellectual Philosophy" in *Shelley: A Critical Reading*, (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University, 1971), pp. 131-153. Abrams' seminal work, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971) provides detailed analysis of the Hegelian connection to Romanticism (both German and British). The book also draws a number of comparisons between the German idealist tradition in general and the British romantic movement; however it does not go into any detail about Hegel's own *Aesthetics* or the idea that there is a movement towards recognition that can be discerned both in Hegel's work and in Romanticism.

20. Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche* 2nd edition (Manchester: Manchester University Press), p. 54.
21. Bowie, p. 81.
22. See especially, Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London: Penguin, 2003).
23. In Nikolas Kompridis (ed.) *Philosophical Romanticism* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 5.
24. See all three writers' contributions to Kompridis (ed.) *Philosophical Romanticism*, as well as other contributions by Beiser, Pippin and Bernstein in the same volume.
25. Jay Bernstein, "Recognition and Embodiment (Fichte's Materialism)" in Espen Hammer (ed.) *German Idealism: Contemporary Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 184.
26. Stephen Houlgate, *An Introduction to Hegel: Freedom, Truth and history* 2nd edition (London: Blackwell, 2005), p. 169.

27. Houlgate, p. 179.
28. The terms symbiosis and alterity may in ordinary usage appear incompatible. For example, alterity is usually used when there is a state of otherness that has to be taken into account; Levinas makes this point with regards to consciousness and Derrida uses it in this sense too. By flagging a symbiosis however we are presupposing two things in an organic (and possibly even antagonistic) relation. However, in my usage Coleridge for example constantly posits a standpoint of autonomy and this is quickly reduced to a state of alterity as he acknowledges the need for example of the external world, culture, timeliness etc. This relationship is also symbiotic in that the relationship to the other is in effect *organic*. This is something that Coleridge constantly rejects as part of his poetic procedure and then re-affirms. For example, and as I discuss in Chapter Three, Coleridge's use of a marriage trope in "Dejection". The organic (and symbiotic) relationship is something that in a Cavellian sense Coleridge fails to fully acknowledge, but it is always *implicit* in his ontology. Wordsworth on the other hand, whilst experiencing the same tension, and whilst recognising (acknowledging) a relationship of his imaginative mind to the otherness of the empirical world, gradually embraces this organic trope, and so realises the symbiotic relationship between his mind and the external world. This is why I argue that the correct phraseology for this tension and dynamic is "symbiotic alterity." The relationship in many romantic thinkers is one of alterity, whilst at an even deeper (organic) level it is in fact a symbiotic (synthetic) one, hence these thinkers, at least at a conscious level, experience an alterity which is in terms of ontology, symbiotic.
29. See Katerina Deligiorgi "Introduction" in Katerina Deligiorgi (ed.) *Hegel: New Directions* (Chesham: Acumen, 2006), pp. 1-9.
30. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. George Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 10.
31. Bowie, p. 151.
32. Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. Joel Anderson (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1996), p. 27.
33. Other romantics such as F.W. Schlegel also became more conservative in later years; Schlegel himself became Catholic in 1808 and edited an anti-Napoleonic newspaper in his later years in Austria.
34. I do however reference Byron's attitude as being one of "Absolute infinite negativity" in Chapter Four when discussing Shelley's treatment of the *One* in "Adonais." This is due to Byron's ironic stance in relation to the idealist Shelley.
35. P.B. Shelley, (Letters, II, 311). Quoted in *P.B. Shelley's Poetry and Prose A Norton Critical Edition*, 2nd edition, p. 408.
36. I must acknowledge in turn however that close philological readings and philosophical readings are of course not mutually exclusive and this is explored in Simon Jarvis' excellent study *Wordsworth's Philosophic Song*, where Jarvis argues that Wordsworth's philosophy is worked out through the syntactical structures of his poetry, and is based upon a close analytical reading of the poems under consideration.

Chapter One

Hegelian Romanticism and the Symbiotic Alterity of Receptivity and Autonomy

1. Introduction

In this chapter I will develop the argument that German philosophical romanticism and Hegelian speculative philosophy offer an interesting space in which to undertake re-readings of English Romanticism. Starting from a Hegelian stance I argue that Romanticism can be re-read in terms of a vacillation between two positions; one of imaginative autonomy and one of necessary receptivity. I argue that what I term this *symbiotic alterity* of autonomy and receptivity reaches a pivotal historical stage in romantic metaphysics and is something that at the same time remains implicit in Hegel's dialectic—thus making Hegel a major romantic thinker. I would like to situate my argument in a teleological context, integrating Hegel's social philosophy with his philosophy of art. Furthermore, I briefly outline some current readings of German romantic metaphysics, in order to help contextualise Hegelian aesthetics with regards to Romanticism as an overall movement. I conclude the chapter by examining a number of current readings of Hegelian aesthetics and assess how these readings can be appropriated in part for my own project of a rereading of some aspects of English Romantic poetry.

The chapter consists of four sections: in the first section I offer some comments on Hegel's social philosophy, in particular the concept of *recognition*. In so doing, I set the groundwork to expand the idea of recognition into the realm of aesthetics. Further, I set the teleological framework for what I propose is the ambivalent relationship of the romantic artist to the world—one which is characterised by a dialectical struggle between imaginative autonomy and receptivity, and one which

ultimately remains unresolved. This is a situation in which the artist attempts to recognize a transcendental truth within their work; or one might say, the artist through the vehicle of their art negotiates a better understanding of themselves and their relation to the external world. Following on from the social framework, I will discuss Hegel's own treatment of romantic art and then illustrate other recent discussions of romantic metaphysics. I will outline Hegel's theory of art in the context of the philosophical romanticism of his contemporaries in order to set the scene for my own reading of English Romanticism, utilizing the tools available from a Hegelian perspective in engaging with philosophical romanticism's self-representations. I conclude by discussing the theory in terms of more recent reception and in so doing discuss any consequent implications for this thesis.

2. Hegel's concept of recognition in an aesthetic light

In this section I will discuss Hegel's concept of recognition, with the aim of identifying its value for a deepened critical understanding of romantic aesthetics. Although I will commence with a discussion of recognition in the sense of *Anerkennung*, I will additionally place my discussion of romantic aesthetics in the context of recognition as a form of cognition that entails a sense of acknowledgment of something outside of an individual consciousness, a *re-cognition* that adds to one's overall conceptual apparatus. This second sense of recognition is also akin to an extension of the notion of *acknowledgment* as posited by Stanley Cavell.¹ This broader understanding of recognition is particularly well-suited to conceptualise romantic ideas, especially the way that the relation of *acknowledgment or of avoidance of nature* displaces the cognitive function of a human other into the natural world. This is the case despite the fact that the romantics also at times seek recognition through another human agent to *a fortiori* guarantee the validity of their

visions, as I will also show throughout the thesis. I draw upon the symbiotic relationship between receptivity to the external world and imaginative autonomy, which I believe is central in Hegel's teleology of recognition and also to high romantic aesthetics in its own search for aesthetic autonomy—a form of aesthetic autonomy that in Romanticism translates as a search for an *aesthetic aesthesis*. Paradoxically, this alleged autonomy is only available through *acknowledgment* of nature and more specifically the subject's organic connection to the natural world. Moreover, the status of imaginative autonomy and receptivity in Hegel's schema of recognition is something that is ultimately reflected in the art of a number of the romantics, and for this reason Hegel can be considered a romantic, or is at least prey to the same vacillations that constitute romantic art in some aspects of its own formations.

After the first three chapters of the *Phenomenology*, the consciousness under observation of the phenomenological observer reaches a point of self-consciousness, but still has to secure the authenticity of this self-consciousness. It seeks therefore another self-consciousness for recognition (*Anerkennung*), or as Hegel has it:

Spirit is—this absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence: 'I' that is 'We' and 'We' that is 'I'. It is in self-consciousness, in the Notion of Spirit, that consciousness first finds its turning point, where it leaves behind it the colourful show of the sensuous here-and-now and the nightlike void of the supersensible beyond, and steps out into the spiritual daylight of the present.²

In the process of attaining self-consciousness or 'mutual recognition' the consciousness enters the dialectical struggle of interaction with an alien consciousness that leads through the life and death struggle to the lordship and bondsman stage and finally, after the experience of unhappy consciousness, mutual

recognition. H.G Gadamer states the wider aim and achievement of recognition in Hegel thus:

The dichotomization of reality into universal and particular, idea and appearance, the law and instances, needs just as much to be eliminated as does the division of consciousness into consciousness on the one side and its object on the other. What is then thought of in the new way is termed the “inner difference” or “infinite” by Hegel. Specifically, insofar as that which differentiates itself within itself is not limited from the outside by the boundary of something else from which it differentiates itself, it is infinite in itself.³

Gadamer neatly sums up the Hegelian project of ‘recognition’ here; the “inner difference” that unfolds with the dialectic gives rise to the establishment of the parts of the *concrete universal*.⁴ Hegel appropriates Aristotle’s concept of *formal-final*⁵ cause by taking this universal both to precede and to be the *telos* of its parts. Hegel, in his absolute idealism, will therefore transcend oppositions such as the *phenomenal/noumenal*, subject/object or the “I/Not I.”

One of the key elements in Hegel’s theory of recognition is the social nature of recognition; one can have self-consciousness before recognition (as with Fichte)⁶ but one cannot be *fully* self-conscious or partake in the universality of consciousness without the recognition of another self-consciousness that will allow identity-in-difference. This is the movement of consciousness that allows for the realm of *Spirit* (*Geist*) itself; this social and practical aspect of recognition has been stressed more recently by thinkers such as Robert Pippin and Terry Pinkard.⁷ For example, in describing freedom in connection with recognition Pippin claims:

[...] freedom is understood by Hegel to involve a certain sort of self-relation and a certain sort of relation to others; it is constituted by *being* in a certain self-regarding and a certain sort of mutually related *state*. Such states are active, involve deeds and practices, but are understood to be free by being undertaken in certain ways, not by having certain causal conditions.⁸

This explicitly social side of Hegel stresses the rationality of freedom and recognition, and proposes a *relational* sense of freedom and recognition. It implies a *mediated* status of autonomy: true autonomy is gained through another and therefore requires receptivity. Robert Williams also comments on the novel nature of autonomy that is apparently inaugurated with the theory of mutual recognition, in both Hegel and Fichte:

Hegel appropriates from Fichte the concept of recognition, according to which freedom is intersubjectively mediated, and individuality is a reciprocal concept with community. At the very least, this implies that autonomy is mediated, and surely the notion of a mediated autonomy is not part of the standard picture of the “philosophy of subject.”⁹

Therefore, Hegel’s transition to self-consciousness through mutual recognition (*Anerkennung*), requires mediation in a relationship with another subject; consequently, a subject’s autonomy rests upon receptivity towards other subjects.

A case can be made for applying Hegel’s concept of recognition into other areas of his philosophy.¹⁰ One advantage of such an extension is that recognition can be seen as the mechanism behind the dialectical teleology that permeates Hegel’s systematic thought and the relational state of autonomy that is preserved among these different domains. A second sense of *cognitive recognition* is central for the traversal of each dialectical *Gestalt*. Only once cognitive acknowledgment has taken place does the mind move into the next shape of consciousness. I will illustrate the claim here and show its plausibility, with examples from Hegel’s treatment of religion and art.

With regards to religion for example, Williams has pointed out the development in terms similar to that of Hegel’s subjective struggle for recognition. Williams argues that Hegel holds Judaism as a stage in which the mighty transcendent *Jaweh* is in a relation of master to slave with humanity, in which people fear a

transcendent, omnipotent god. In this stage of development in the philosophy of art Hegel also claims that the God of Judaism stands above the corporeal world of man and nature; man stands in an essentially negative relationship to the great Jewish God. In the *Aesthetics* this is also one of the forms in the early symbolic stage of art for Hegel. However, by the time of Christianity man and God are reconciled through mutual recognition. This is exemplified in the crucifixion, as Williams claims:

The alternative, [to Judaism] with which Hegel now identifies Christianity, is a tragic vision whose leading categories are not sin and punishment, but tragic conflict and its resolution in the reconciliation of fate. Thus, the alternative to heteronomy is no longer Kantian moral autonomy and its faith in a moral universe, but rather tragic conflict and its resolution. [...] Incarnation—which Hegel reformulates as the *mutual recognition* of God and man—replaces the royal metaphor (of Judaism).¹¹

Thus, we see an instance of recognition through Hegel's treatment of the religious sphere, and once again a step away from complete autonomy to an onto-theology that presupposes receptivity in the development of religious consciousness. Hegel himself further expands recognition into the formal structures and dynamics of the modern state in *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1821)¹² and this culminates in the requirement of recognitive acknowledgment at the level of the nation state:

The nation state [*das Volk als Staat*] is the spirit in its substantial rationality and immediate actuality, and is therefore the absolute power on *earth*; each state is consequently a sovereign and independent entity in relation to others. The state has a primary and absolute entitlement to be a sovereign and independent power *in the eyes of others*, i.e. *to be represented* by them. At the same time, however, this entitlement is purely formal and the requirement that the state should be recognised simply because it is a state is abstract. Whether the state does in fact have being in and for itself depends on its content—on its constitution and [present] condition; and recognition, which implies that the two [i.e. form and content] are identical, also depends on the perception and will of the other state.¹³

In the context of this thesis however, the central question is how recognition and the *symbiotic alterity* of receptivity and autonomy are relevant to aesthetics.

Frederick Beiser, writing of the status of art in relation to religion and philosophy, and following the trajectory of Hegel's *Aesthetics*, explains the ostensible reason for art's lower status in terms of *Spirit*. Hegel claims that art only belongs to the first stage of Spirit where Spirit goes outside of itself and finds itself in another. However, we have seen the return to self in religion (the incarnation) and the self-in-other and return to the self in the *Phenomenology*. In contrast, with works of art the self never returns *into* itself, but just has itself instantiated *in the external* work of art:

Part of Hegel's argument here is that aesthetic experience doesn't involve the structure of identity-in-difference characteristic of spirit. That structure requires that self and its other, subject and object, have the same status; but in the case of art the object is something dead and external, and so not on the same footing as the subject itself. Hence Hegel explains how the artist can distance himself from his object, ridiculing and even destroying it.¹⁴

Beiser's reading of Hegel in terms of the dialectical nature of *Spirit* is correct, however there is more to be said on this point; in order to open up the argument one needs to once again broaden the use of recognition in Hegel and to include the concept of "cognition" or "re-cognition" (*Erkenntnis*). This cognitive sense of recognition is implicit in the movement of consciousness as it cognises the external world and *acknowledges* it as part of the overall Concept (*Begriff*) or Notion. With this broader conceptualisation of recognition there is equally a teleological development and a necessary receptivity presupposed in order for the subject to cognise self-knowledge—however *no requirement* of an alien consciousness or *mutual* recognition. Paul de Man writes of recognition in this second sense and claims that there is an externalisation of the mind as it projects itself before *returning into itself* in Hegel, which gives once again a sense of a *struggle* for recognition that entails a certain kind of receptivity:

Thought is proleptic: it projects the hypothesis of its possibility into a future, in the hyperbolic expectation that the process that made thought possible will eventually catch up with this projection. The hyperbolic I projects itself as thought in the hope of re-cognizing itself when it will have run its course. This is why thought (*denken*) is ultimately called by Hegel *Erkenntnis* (which implies recognition) and is considered to be superior to knowledge (*wissen*). At the end of the gradual progression of its own functioning, as it moves from perception to representation and finally to thought, the intellect will re-find and recognise itself.¹⁵

Here thought “projects” itself into the externality of the future before synchronically returning into itself, and thus “re-cognizing itself when it has run its course.” In this broader sense of recognition one can also see a struggle for the cognition for thought of it-self, and there is a similar projection of thought in the realm of aesthetics.

The object of art opens up the subject (artist) to itself, and the subject also returns into itself (or re-cognises itself) through the formation or cognisance of the aesthetic object. If art simply entailed disinterested contemplation then the whole edifice of Hegelian aesthetic theory would collapse—as it presupposes the lifting of inner Spirit by the subject through art into the corporeal world of representation. The work of art requires explication and identification within the subject, whether the putative subject is the recipient or the artist. Moreover, Beiser reads Hegel as claiming that the “self and its other, subject and object, have the same status.” Again, this is clearly true for recognition (*Anerkennung*) as outlined in chapter four of the *Phenomenology*, but it is not as clear for religion and aesthetics. However, if one emphasises Hegel’s belief that Spirit pervades all reality a commonality emerges between Hegelian thought and the ontological foundation of romantic aesthetics. Schlegel and Novalis both saw the external world as a “thou” which was as such imbued with a consciousness of its own.¹⁶ This self-conscious mediation is something that also binds the Jena romantics to a necessarily receptive relationship with the external world, the “I-thou.” Furthermore, the attempt by the romantics to

synthesise Spinoza's monism with Fichtean subjectivity¹⁷ was something that culminated in their organic philosophy (and something that I shall argue in Chapter Three also transpires in the work of Wordsworth). Hegel's theory similarly draws upon Spinoza and Fichte, and similarly produces an organic philosophy, again illustrating his own "romantic" tendencies. Although ostensibly not a theory of hylozoism, there is in Hegel the romantic idea of the mind being of the same *Spirit* as the natural world, although at a higher level of organisation, thereby implying that only through interaction with this world does *Spirit* gain (through the thinking subject) self-consciousness. This further exemplifies the relational autonomy postulated with regards to recognition described above. These monistic connections (in both Hegel and the Jena romantics) that attempt to transcend the subject/object distinction that culminated in Kantian dualism, bring us back to the question of the dead and external world. If the thinking subject is the highest emanation of the natural world, or as Schelling has it "Nature should be visible spirit, and spirit invisible nature,"¹⁸ then the *symbiotic alterity* of autonomy and receptivity once again becomes abundantly clear: the subject has to commune with (its apparent other), nature, and indeed can never be *completely* autonomous due to his place *within* the organic system. Therefore, in both Hegel and the romantics there is a process of recognition at work, in the sense that in our interactions with the external world (to which we are inextricably linked) we divine knowledge of ourselves. This in turn can be seen as the outcome of the crisis of reason that leads to our *deworlded subjectivity*¹⁹—a subjectivity that has become released or alienated from the natural world. In this sense, the response to a mechanised nature on the one hand and a *deworlded* post-Kantian subjectivity on the other, can be recognised as the key

elements in creating the play of subjective autonomy and receptivity to the external world.

The aesthetic experience requires a dialectical interrogation of the subject and the universe (or world, externality, culture, etc). This experience problematises the ‘everyday’, or helps to bring the ‘everyday’ back to the subject, in some other form, a form which is imbued (in the case of Post-Reformation art²⁰) with a sense of universal *Spirit*. Given the view that *Spirit* pervades all reality, treating art-works as simply something “external and dead” is something that in Hegelian terms is itself problematic. We ought therefore to slightly alter our terms of ‘recognition’; if we talk of recognition in terms other than mutual (*Anerkennung*) recognition and expand the term to encompass its use in the wider sense of cognitive recognition or acknowledgment, we are permitted to see a new sense of a “struggle” for recognition of ourselves in the external world, as opposed to recognition of ourselves in another subject—a new recognition in terms of the poet’s response to the external world that is configured in subjectivity. The concept of autonomy plays a *performative* conceptual role *for* the subject in his interactions with the world, however this role remains at best regulatory and any true self-knowledge is unattainable without the pole of receptivity.

3. Hegel’s response to romantic art

When discussing Hegel’s aesthetics one has to be aware of the status of Hegel’s theory of art, as it is far from unified and the *Aesthetics* has been subject to scrutiny and debate by scholars recently.²¹ Hegel’s position with regards to Romanticism as an art form was varied in that on the one hand Hegel believed romantic art to be part of the development of *Spirit*, a mode in relation to the holistic development of *Spirit* towards its full self-awareness. As such, Hegel afforded art an important cognitive

status, as did the contemporary romantics. However, Hegel also demonstrated hostility towards Jena Romanticism and its ideals of fragmentation, irony and self-conscious representation. In discussing Hegel's approach to romantic art in general we therefore have to demarcate between his historical conception of romantic art and his treatment of philosophical German Romanticism. I would firstly like to adumbrate Hegel's position towards art in the context of his philosophical theory in general and subsequently critique Hegel's position with regards to philosophical romanticism (or romantic metaphysics).

For Hegel, art is one of the historical phenomena that define spirit, the other two higher categories being religion and philosophy. Examples of art (depending on the type of art and the historical period) serve to represent the manifestation, or attempted manifestation, of *Spirit*. *Spirit* needs to know itself in-itself and for-others, and this works in art in a similar way to formal religion, such as Christianity, whereby man knows God as defined for the corporeality of man, through the incarnation and the resurrection. Man knows himself and is set apart from nature in the same fashion as God relates to man; both processes are an extension and development of pure *Spirit*:

The universal and absolute need from which art (on its formal side) springs has its origin in the fact that man is a *thinking* consciousness, i.e. that man draws out of himself and puts *before himself* what he is and whatever else is. Things in nature are only *immediate* and *single*, while man as spirit *duplicates* himself, in that (i) he is as things in nature are, but (ii) he is just as much *for* himself; he sees himself, represents himself to himself, thinks, and only in the strength of this active placing himself before himself is he spirit. [...] The universal need for art, that is to say, is man's rational need to lift the inner and outer world into his spiritual consciousness as an object in which he again *recognises* his own self. The need for this spiritual freedom he satisfies, on the one hand, within by making what is within him explicit to himself, but correspondingly by giving outward reality to this his explicit self, and thus in this duplication of himself by bringing what is in him into sight and knowledge for himself and others.²² (*my italics*)

Art has moved through three stages of sensual expression of the Idea for Hegel: the symbolic, the classical and the romantic, the romantic being the final stage of art. This stage is the point where absolute spirit attempts to turn in on itself—therefore losing all clear and beautiful corporeal definition as achieved in the classical stage. The development of religion ties in with world historical development and in turn correlates with the development of art. Hegel himself points out the movement in the *Encyclopedia* after the symbolic stage in art and religion where the “—figuration suitable to the Idea is not yet found, and the thought as going forth and wrestling with the figure is exhibited as a negative attitude to it, and yet all the while toiling to work itself into it.”²³ Hegel identified the works of Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, the Egyptians and Judaism as being largely symbolic, whereby art often would serve a deictic function, in which the aesthetic signifier stands at a distance from the signified. Next, there is the classical stage of Greek art, which moves beyond primitive aesthetics and religion into the realm of classical representation and anthropomorphic gods. This is the historical period where representational art most closely correlates with religious beliefs and is described by Hegel in the *Phenomenology* as the “religion of art.” Here we have the strongest bond between form and content. The Idea attempts to find itself and express itself in the most beautiful corporeal forms, the highest of which is sculpture, although Hegel also writes of the beauty of Greek tragedies, such as Sophocles’ *Antigone*. However, again in an act of infinite negativity, the spirit transcends the corporeal and becomes self-conscious, turning in on itself at the stage of romantic art, whereby we have a spirit expressed not in anthropomorphic signifiers but as the abstract god of monotheism, who signifies a deep Christian love that is transcendent of sensible appearance:

In another way the Idea and the sensuous figure it appears in are incompatible; and that is where the infinite form, subjectivity, is not as in the first extreme a mere superficial personality, but its inmost depth, and God is known not as only seeking his form or satisfying himself in an external form, but as only finding himself in himself, and thus giving himself his adequate in the spiritual world alone. Romantic art gives up the task of showing him in such an external form and by means of beauty: it presents him only as condescending to appearance, and the divine as the heart of hearts in an externality from which it always disengages itself. Thus the external can here appear as contingent towards its significance.²⁴

The concept of love had been hugely important to Hegel in his formative Frankfurt years (around 1797) and indeed formed the basis for many of his later ideas, including *Spirit*, the dialectic and ultimately his theory of ethical life—*Sittlichkeit*.²⁵ Because of the profound inwardness of its spiritual freedom there is a sense of deep expressiveness in romantic art and a gap once again emerges between the aesthetic signifier and the signified, or the form and content. Christian art is very important as a romantic art in that it in effect humanizes the divine in terms of the sufferings of Christ. Moreover, Hegel also celebrates the beauty of inwardness in figures that express strong independent character such as Macbeth and the personal virtues of characters with strong commitments. These are all very expressive modes of profoundly inward-states of feeling, indicative of romantic art. However, after the Reformation Hegel believed that art lost its religious significance in that it became more *secular*. Hegel therefore believed that art in effect lost its former power for expressing the divine. Art had begun to rest more with representing the bourgeois everyday, and Hegel believed that in imbuing the everyday with our inner Spirit we could still produce valuable works of art, albeit without the function they once played in our religious and ethical life. Hegel admired the seventeenth century Dutch masters who imbued objects with the modern, secular, human form of freedom, as Stephen Houlgate comments:

By freeing art from religion and by also emancipating the secular, Protestantism allows art to explore with a good conscience the subtle beauty of the everyday. Once art has become liberated in this way, however, its distinctive vocation is no longer to give expression to the Divine. Art is thus no longer able to fulfill its *highest* calling. Nevertheless, art is still able to create beauty by giving sensuous expression to concrete human freedom and natural life.²⁶

The capture of the concrete *embodiment* of human freedom in art is therefore still of significance for Hegel, even if it has lost its former function of giving sensuous expression to the divine.

Art in general is for Hegel a form of concrete universality and therefore the whole precedes its parts, as in religion and philosophy. However, as representation, art works in a sense on a synecdochic level in that it grasps the whole in its concrete universality and yet represents the whole through its particular parts. Moreover, at the stage of the romantic there is an even wider bridge between the representations of the whole through the parts— at this point Hegel argues that the concrete universality of religion as intuition is more suited to expression of the *Spirit* in the form of Christianity. Therefore, there is a hierarchy that has developed in which art now becomes subordinate to both religion and philosophy, and inferior in terms of its ability to represent this new realization of *Spirit*. It is in this sense that Hegel begins to take issue with the *Frühromantiker*, due to the fact that they placed art on a par with (and sometimes above) philosophy, which for Hegel entailed a drastic misconception of philosophy's relationship to the *concrete universal*, in that philosophy sees the *whole* in relation to the parts and therefore is a more complete representation.

4. Hegel and romantic metaphysics

As I stated above, Hegel recognized the ability of art to grasp the absolute, and indeed as concrete universality art was held to be even higher than the discursive

understanding for Hegel. However, Hegel's system meant that in the Post-Reformation age, art could no longer serve the purpose assigned to it during earlier periods of history. The Jena romantics in contrast, argued that art was a self-legislating form of expression and was therefore of a higher order than philosophy.

As Beiser claims:

However, where the romantics went astray, in Hegel's view, is in placing art above philosophy. They could do this, he argued, only because they had limited philosophy to the abstract concepts of the understanding. They did not have a proper appreciation, therefore, of the dialectical form of reason. For two reasons, Hegel held that the dialectic is a more adequate form of concrete universality than art. First, it grasps explicitly and self-consciously what art sees only implicitly and subconsciously. Second, although the institutions of art see the unity of the whole, the dialectic also grasps unity-in-difference, i.e. it sees each part of the whole and how they depend upon it.²⁷

The romantic idea of an infinite *Sehnsucht* is something that Hegel presents as an incomplete conception of the speculative *Idea*. For Hegel, the romantic conception relies on a bad sense of infinity, whereby there is no unity-in-difference, and the romantics conceptualised the infinite as being that which is never *completely* attainable, always in a state of becoming or flux. Moreover, F.W. Schlegel claimed that the notion of a speculative philosophy that was constructed with the grounding notion of a *concrete universal* was a fiction as philosophy had to be started from the *centre* like an epic poem:

Philosophy must have at its basis not only an alternating proof [*Wechselbeweis*] but also an alternating concept [*Wechselbegriff*]. In the case of every concept, as in the case of every proof, one can in turn ask for a concept and a proof of the same. For this reason, philosophy, like an epic poem, must start in the middle, and it is impossible to pursue philosophy piece by piece starting from a first piece which is grounded and explained completely in and through itself. It is a whole, and thus the path to recognizing it is no straight line but a circle.²⁸

The dynamic and non-reductive movement of the world-in-flux is also mirrored by works such as Novalis' 'Monolog', whereby "the self-referential play of language mirrors the

dynamic relations between things and expresses the soul of the world.”²⁹ Or equally, it is represented by the theoretical self-consciousness of a novel like Schlegel’s *Lucinde*. Frank describes the romantic reaction to totalising epistemology such as Hegel’s thus:

If moreover we assume that this process continues to infinity, i.e. that there is never any final certainty, then we have to abandon the idea of definitive justification altogether. In place of the infinite we get (romantic) ‘yearning’ for it; and in place of an evidential theory of truth we get one that has to show all the relationships in the world and in consciousness in the greatest possible ‘harmony’ (as Erhard puts it).³⁰

For Hegel however, romantic irony as postulated by theorists such as Schlegel was premature and not a true recognition of the third stage of the liberated idea (*Aufhebung*) into the realm of absolute spirit both in and for-itself *and* for-others. Moreover, in Hegelian terms they would share the fate of the German writer and critic Solger, who almost transcends the world of romantic irony postulated by Schlegel:

In this process he (Solger) came to the dialectical moment of the Idea, to the point which I call ‘infinite absolute negativity’, to the activity of the Idea in so negating itself as infinite and universal as to become finitude and particularity, and in nevertheless cancelling this negation in turn and so re-establishing the universal and infinite in the finite and particular. To this negativity Solger firmly clung, and of course it is *one element* in the speculative Idea, yet interpreted as this purely dialectical unrest and dissolution of both infinite and finite, only *one element*, and not, as Solger will have it, the *whole* idea. Unfortunately Solger’s life was broken off too soon for him to have been able to reach the concrete development of the philosophical Idea.³¹

“Infinite absolute negativity” is the stage at which the Jena romantics after Kant remain, within a subjective mode of consciousness, exemplified in works such as the subjective *Athenaeum* poetics, “yearning for the infinite” without a complete and concrete apprehension of the *absolute idea*. Schlegel had indeed famously claimed at the end of *Athenaeum* fragment 116:

The romantic kind of poetry is still in the state of becoming; that, in fact, is its real essence: that it should forever be becoming and never be perfected. It can be exhausted by no theory and only a divinatory

criticism would dare try to characterize its ideal. It alone is infinite, just as it alone is free; and it recognizes as its first commandment that the will of the poet can tolerate no law above itself.³²

On this view, the romantic work of poetry is the same as philosophy; it partakes in the *poesy* that can be found both within the world and in subjects within the world, an infinite play, with no ultimate grounding, and hence no sense of a *concrete universal*. Here we have also the ideal of art as the highest expression of this process. Furthermore, Schlegel also regards the work of art as a heterocosm, or a technical world unto itself. As he claims in fragment 206 “[a] fragment, *like a small work of art*, has to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world and be complete in itself like a porcupine.”³³ (*my italics*) Into this world we have the representation of ultimate autonomy, an autonomy that represents the play of *poesy*. Of course, even though the fragment is isolated from the world and complete in itself, it stands in relation to other fragmentary representations of the world, each partaking in the infinite *Sehnsucht* and each notionally self-representing.³⁴ Again therefore, in romantic metaphysics there is on the one hand a sense of the autonomy, which discloses a sense of freedom, at least from “the surrounding world” yet at the same time, a receptivity to a process of *poesy* which necessarily entails an infinite yearning, and can never be exhausted.

In a recent paper, Jay Bernstein claims that Schlegel attempts to free (romantic) aesthetics of their bond to the sensible world, thereby developing his position *beyond* that of Lessing into a fully romantic theory of art.

In Lessing, the idea of painting as a constitutive constraint on poetic language is the final moment of resistance to the emptying of the natural world of any authority, since what it means for Lessing to make poetic language painterly is to make linguistic meaning appear as if natural. The claim for the universality of *poesy*, as premised on the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, necessarily dissolves even this constraint.³⁵

Thus, according to Bernstein's radical reading, Schlegel moves beyond any medium-bound constraints and in doing so maneuvers towards the position of fragment and irony that becomes central to romantic philosophy and is central to the conception of aesthetic autonomy in self-creation, or a sense of *aesthetic aesthesis*. Moreover, Bernstein cites the works of Blanchot and de Man as bringing Schlegelian philosophy into its poststructuralist fruition, and the event of non-meaning or "the knowing of non-knowledge."³⁶ This is a concept to which I will return in Chapter Four, when discussing Shelley's own scepticism at the end of his life; however, Shelley I argue reaches this conclusion through *acknowledgment* of the delimitations of receptivity to the empirical world.

Bernstein takes a much more negative view of the space inhabited by romantic irony and fragment than Rush. According to Fred Rush, the dialectical nature of Schlegel's position is 'historical, contextual and open-ended: Hegelian dialectic is historical, teleological and closed.'³⁷ Rush further goes on to defend romantic irony by claiming that it is an offshoot of Schlegel's attempt to distance himself from subjective Fichtean foundationalism:

Reality for Schlegel then is not reducible to subjectivity; rather, the capacity of a subject to comprehend reality itself presupposes much on the part of reality that is not due to the constitutive role of the subject, or, even stronger, is incomprehensible. [...] The ability to detach (in part) from one's life involves at least an intimation that what transcends experience constrains experience in ways that cannot be exhaustively understood. In dialectical terms, subjects externalize themselves in the world, partly forming it, but likewise they "come back to themselves" from that world, internalizing it and coming to recognize limitation in virtue of that activity.³⁸

For Rush, romantic irony is a positive philosophical move that helps not only with our modern experience of the world but also gives us once again a sense of context and historicity that has perhaps been overlooked in totalizing philosophies such as Hegel's. Moreover, the use of dialectic is *also* prevalent in *his* reading of

Schlegelian irony. In fact, contra Beiser, who claims Hegel rejected the romantics due to their failure to appreciate “the dialectical nature of reason,” Rush argues that the central point of difference was more a question of the nature of Schlegel’s “open-ended” dialectic as opposed to Hegel’s “closed” dialectic. Bernstein posits a much stronger sense of autonomy in Schlegel, whereas Rush reads a much stronger sense of receptivity. However, both readings are instructive when we read romantic metaphysics in terms of the vacillation between autonomy and receptivity.

Hegel did argue that aesthetic discourse should necessarily accompany art and that there was more need for aesthetics in the Post-Reformation age. Again, for romantics such as Schlegel there was no “law” above the poet and as such the work of art was in some sense a transcendental self-reflection or critique. Therefore, the whole question of aesthetics as a *discipline* was also at stake for both Hegel and Schlegel. For Hegel of course, philosophy is the highest form of knowing, one that moves beyond both art and religion and recognises the full nature of the organic relationship between the concrete idea and its parts. As Hegel claims at the end of the *Phenomenology*:

Thus, what in religion was *content* or a form for presenting an *other*, is here the *Self’s* own *act*. For this Notion is, as we see, the knowledge of the Self’s act within itself as all essentiality and all existence, the knowledge of this subject as substance and of the substance as this knowledge of its act. [...] This last shape of spirit—the Spirit which at the same time gives its complete and true content the form of the Self and thereby realizes its Notion as remaining in its Notion in this realization—this is absolute knowing; it is Spirit that knows itself in the shape of Spirit, or a *comprehensive knowing* [in terms of the notion].³⁹

Spirit has become self-aware through an awareness of the universal conceptualization that is inherent in the active consciousness, having traversed the various *Gestalten* of consciousness. This therefore is a stage past the state of aporia inherent in Romanticism and something that Solger almost realized, but for his

untimely death. Indeed, for Hegel the very state of Kantian dualism in itself gives the thinking subject the spur to the absolute. This unity of apperception is itself something only experienced through consciousness but this acts as a stimulus to the consciousness—in terms of Hegel’s logic this spurs the subject forward; objects in a sense are being-for-knowledge of the absolute. In fact Hegel claims that knowledge moves through the various epistemic *Gestalten* until it gives in-itself an awareness of the absolute; this movement is forever driven by the nature of the very reflective process of positing in-itself. Hegel also addresses this in the introduction to the *Phenomenology*:

But the *goal* is as necessarily fixed for knowledge as the serial progression; it is the point where knowledge no longer needs to go beyond itself, where knowledge finds itself, where Notion corresponds to object and object to Notion. Hence the progress towards this goal is also unhalting, and short of it no satisfaction is to be found at any of the stations on the way. Whatever is confirmed within the limits of a natural life cannot by its own efforts go beyond its immediate existence; but it is driven beyond it by something else, and this uprooting entails its death. Consciousness, however, is explicitly the *Notion* of itself. Hence it is something that goes beyond limits, and since these limits are its own, it is something that goes beyond itself.⁴⁰

Consciousness, by being aware of itself, goes beyond its own limits by paradoxically realizing these limits in being fully self-aware. Of course, one can argue that this sounds like Hegel is proposing a kind of aporia, which is entailed within our self-awareness, and is therefore not entirely alien to the sensibilities of Jena Romanticism. However, Hegel goes on to decry the bad faith of a conscience that retreats into itself, as pure ego (a possible reference to Fichte or the romantics) and denies the universal:

This conceit which understands how to belittle every truth, in order to turn back into itself and gloat over its own understanding, which knows how to dissolve every thought and always find the same barren Ego instead of any content— this is a satisfaction which we

must leave to itself, for it flees from the universal, and seeks only to be for itself.⁴¹

This appears the crux of Hegel's attack on romantic subjectivism: a position opposed to the consciousness that "flees from the universal" in whatever path this thought may take, including that of irony. It appears that the mistake of the romantic ironist is not to conceive of the metaphysical logic implicit in Hegel's overall system.

Furthermore, for Hegel the grandest examples of art are indeed the classical manifestations of Spirit, whereby the idea is not greater than the medium that renders the idea; i.e. is anthropomorphic. Therefore, art's best examples of Spirit in its development are *embodied*. Whereas for the romantics the autonomy of poesy (whether it be as a reflection of the natural world, or as an ultimate form of aesthesis on Bernstein's reading) is of central importance to the work of art, and thus requires a strong sense of *disembodiment*. For example, Schlegel's move away from even the "painterly constraints" proposed by Lessing insinuates a certain autonomy and disengagement from sensible representation to a celebration of the disembodied freedom of poesy and the imagination. Following Rush's "contextual" reading of Schlegel's project however, one sees the need to arguably embody this aesthetic in something external to the poet's imagination. Again, the romantic poet can use autonomy as a regulative principle of sorts, but ultimately needs to render his autonomy contextual, and consequently receptive to external constraints; or perhaps one could say the poet can only *experience autonomy through receptivity*. I will further discuss my embodiment thesis in the section below.

5. Hegel's Aesthetics in the modern context

In this section I would like to show how modern reception of Hegel may be drawn on in order to help explicate Romanticism. I will assess how these readings of Hegel depend upon the ambivalent relationship between autonomy and receptivity, and that in the realm of aesthetics, receptivity entails a *necessary embodiment*, within either another person, a landscape, or another physical vessel. In the case of abstract art, this relationship is pushed towards a post-romantic sense of *imaginative disembodiment*, whereby the artist attempts a complete disengagement from the vessels of embodiment, and attempts to move towards an absolute *aesthetic aesthesis*. However, the artwork still requires receptivity to cultural norms, history and the timeliness of art, and as such the space within which the art operates is never completely autonomous.

A major position towards Hegelian aesthetics in the twentieth century was that adopted by Arthur Danto,⁴² who claims that art has indeed lost its former relevance, however not in the romantic period but in the 1960s after Warhol's *Brillo Box*. According to Jason Gaiger however, Danto has misread the bent in Hegel's aesthetics. For one thing, Hegel's view of contemporary Romanticism was a major factor in his viewpoint:

However, his views are also motivated by what he saw as the failure of Romanticism. His insistence that thought and reflection have 'taken their flight above fine art' can be seen as a response to those artists and theorists who continued to identify art as the highest and most vital form of human self-expression.⁴³

The important thing to note is that Gaiger adopts a more neutral view of the *Aesthetics*, however he also picks up on what I feel is a profoundly important point in Hegel's overall theory, the idea of *representation* and its variance during the three different historical periods of art. On Hegel's ideas of aesthetic representation, Gaiger claims that "Central to his account, however, is his recognition that a work of

art cannot be a mere sign (*Zeichen*). For what distinguishes a sign from a symbol is that the meaning and the vehicle through which this meaning is expressed are connected with one another in a purely arbitrary way.”⁴⁴ Gaiger goes on to explain that throughout the history of art Hegel has identified one period of “adequation” which is the classical stage of art, a relatively short time period of only “a few centuries.”⁴⁵ Gaiger then makes another strong point in that the importance in Hegel’s theory is not his neoclassicist evocation of antiquity but the dynamics involved in the other representative arts.

It is only if judged by the standards of eighteenth-century classicism that Symbolic and Romantic art can be said to “fail”. Not for the first time, we need to turn Hegel on his head and declare that the true character of art is best captured by the distances, contradictions, gaps, and incompleteness of Symbolic and Romantic art. Herein lies not the breakdown of art as a form of sensuous expression but the source of its continuing strength and vitality.⁴⁶

The *tensions* inherent in art forms such as Romanticism are indeed varied and mean there is usually no straightforward interpretation of a work of art. Here, Gaiger teases out what I find to be the reasons for the tensions inherent in the majority of art at least after the romantic period. If form and content were ideally suited to one another during the period of classical antiquity, then I would agree with Hegel that in the modern period there is a *space* in representation, or a further wedge between the signifier and the signified. In fact, one could characterize the relationship between the signifier and signified during the Symbolic stage as being *centripetal*, in that the aesthetic signifier is moving towards the central signified (or *Spirit* in Hegel). The classical can thus be read as the stage of ‘adequation’, whereas the romantic is characterized by a *centrifugal* relationship between the signifier and the signified, or a stage whereby the signifier moves beyond the central signified. This *space* can be said to open up the horizon of meaning and create more space for

imaginative maneuver in both the artist and the recipient. Herein lies also the radicalization of art, and the political nature of much romantic art—and later modernist art—as a response to a modernity which ‘yearns’ for the stability between form and meaning allegedly inherent in the ‘golden age’ of antiquity.

At this point I would like to return to the themes of receptivity and autonomy. Pippin has written of reading modernist art in terms of Hegelian aesthetics and has convincingly argued that abstract artworks represent the subjectivity of the modern world in effect enacting itself through representational art. Pippin claims:

There is, in other words, no negative theology in Hegel’s strange humanistic theology. His progressivism is everywhere decisive; we have *broken* free of a fundamental dependence on such sensible images not so much because of *their* inadequacy as because of *our* having made ourselves independent of them, and art must be understood as part and parcel of that work. Again, none of this means that we become or realize we always were supernatural beings or that we can ignore our corporeality. We remain finite, constrained in all the obvious ways by natural limitations. But the experience of, the very meaning of, such naturality is now to be regarded as a human achievement,...⁴⁷

Pippin’s deflationary humanism entails a self-legislating normativity, found in the very positing of freedom in aesthetic practice. As such, the representations are purely abstract and without dependence on “sensible images.” This Kantian reading of subjectivity also returns us to the state of *deworloded subjectivity*, and one can indeed see an argument for abstract art as being the logical rejoinder to Romanticism. It certainly outlines one important aspect of the romantic movement after Kant—that of autonomy. Pippin indeed goes on to argue that:

Representational art cannot adequately express the full subjectivity of experience, the wholly self-legislating, self-authorizing status of the norms that constitute such subjectivity, thus, cannot adequately express who we (now) are. Only philosophy can “heal” such a self-inflicted wound and allow the self-determining character of experience its adequate expression. (“Only philosophy,” that is, on Hegel’s official account. I am trying to suggest that there is no reason

a form of art, like abstraction, could not make such a point in a nondiscursive way.)⁴⁸

Again, Pippin returns us to the autonomy that in his overall framework pervades modernity. Pippin's subjectivist stance I believe is one *also* taken up in the period of the romantics through their own representations, however it is only *one* pole—the other being *necessary* receptivity to natural processes. This is the subjectivity taken up by romantic poetics, (and later in the ultimately disembodied works of the symbolists). Moreover, if we examine the relationship between signifier and signified in genres like Abstract Expressionism we find a self-referential trope, in which the medium becomes the message: the medium becomes the self-representational, autonomous signifier, without direct reference to the *sensible*; this is a space in which the artist attempts to develop a self-referential *Parole*. I believe upon consideration, that Hegel would have disliked abstract art, whereas Schlegel would have whole-heartedly approved.

One criticism of Pippin's approach would be of his extreme subjectivism. Katerina Deligiorgi has argued that artistic practice is dualistic in that the artist in the very act of freely choosing their work is subject to an external necessitation. Accordingly:

The key problem is Pippin's over-emphatic endorsement of subjective legislation; in order to guarantee its autonomy, its independence from nature, he presents it as an act of self-creation *ex nihilo*.⁴⁹

One cannot simply ignore the element of externality that goes into artistic transmission in the modern world, whereby the artist is of necessity forced to *acknowledge* the demands of modern culture for the "elevation of Humanus"⁵⁰ and in so doing will *realise* his freedom. This duality is one that a strongly subjectivist reading ignores. Deligiorgi's reading therefore takes on board the sense of

receptivity that I feel is necessary in art, whether it be to a tradition⁵¹ or a philosophical demand, or to the demands of a culture. This experience of the modern world by the artist was, I believe, one that was countenanced by the romantics and actively engaged within the bounds of their poetry. There is no autonomy without receptivity; the two exist symbiotically—hence the *symbiotic alterity* between the two that I postulate throughout this thesis. Houlgate further takes a different reading to that of Pippin’s on Hegel and abstract painting, which is more conservative and in many respects, more normative. He criticizes abstraction in art by setting it in opposition to the *concrete freedom* that is required according to his reading of the *Aesthetics*.

If art is to fulfil its distinctive task in the modern, post-Reformation era, therefore, it must—where it can—depict or describe concrete natural and human forms, because life and human freedom are nothing outside or apart from their concrete embodiment.⁵²

Houlgate is expressing what in my thesis is one side of the same coin, and the danger for criticism is to become *entrenched in either* of the camps. True romantic art works in a space between these two poles, and needs this space in order to work as a process. Houlgate further claims in his reading of Hegel:

To the extent that painters such as Pollock endeavour to present the act of creation in their work, but do not proceed to create images of concrete life and human freedom, they, too, would be guilty of abstraction, in Hegel’s view—because they give expression to human creative activity *abstracting* from the concrete embodied form that human freedom itself takes.⁵³

This is a direct criticism of the abstract painters due their lack of use of “images of concrete freedom.” In setting the argument in the context of this concrete freedom Houlgate further reads Hegel in terms of his utilisation of nature as essential for the embodiment of human spirit in representation:

If painting is the visual expression of inner subjectivity, it must give visual expression to the fact that subjectivity releases the sphere of

the external as independent of itself. [...] In giving expression to subjectivity that has withdrawn into itself and let nature go free, therefore, painting is required by its very nature to portray human beings as situated in an architectural or natural context.⁵⁴

Here we have an account of “inner subjectivity” on one hand and the important proviso for artistic expression that formulates the idea that humans need to be “situated in an architectural or *natural* context.” This reading suggests once again both autonomy and receptivity in the work of art in that the poet requires receptivity to the “sphere of the external” in order for expression of freedom. In effect, the idea needs to be couched in the concrete, or *embodied*. Hegel himself writes in the *Aesthetics* of poetry’s spiritual autonomy, but also its continued reliance on sensuous or natural contexts for representation, even though it represents at a higher stage than even music, absolute *Spirit*:

In the first place, externality as such, i.e. objects in nature, can at once be excluded, relatively at least, from the subject-matter suitable for poetical conception. The proper subject-matter of poetry is spiritual interests, not the sun, mountains, woods, landscapes, or constituents of the human body like nerves, blood muscles, etc. For however far poetry also involves an element of vision and illustration, it still remains even in this respect a spiritual activity and it works for *inner* intuition to which the spirit is nearer and more appropriate than *external* objects in their concrete visible and external appearance. Therefore this entire external sphere enters poetry only in so far as the spirit finds in it a stimulus or some material for its activity; in other words it enters as a *human* environment, as man’s external world which has essential worth only in relation to man’s inner consciousness and which may not claim the dignity of being, purely on its own account, the exclusive subject-matter of poetry. The subject-matter really corresponding to poetry is the infinite wealth of the spirit.⁵⁵

The “human environment” Hegel describes is still however the concrete environment, without which there would be no concretely universal apprehension of the universal.

Gaiger has pointed out the prescriptive nature of both Houlgate’s and Pippin’s reading of the *Aesthetics*, and his view offers a more historicist, or descriptive

reading. I feel a close analysis of these two readings however also shows up the tensions within aesthetic practice, and the twin poles of autonomy and receptivity; on the one hand there is an undeniable *deworlding* of the subject that leads the artist towards an interrogation of autonomy, whilst at the same time there is a receptivity required, either for concretisation of that freedom or to necessary cultural forces that negate the purely Promethean reading of modernity suggested by Pippin. As Gaiger rightly claims, we need to “turn Hegel on his head” in order to get a more fruitful reading of the dynamics inherent in Romanticism, and to escape the neoclassicist bias that appears implicitly in Hegel’s *Aesthetics*.

Interestingly, one can read the *Aesthetics* in the sense of a “struggle for *aesthetic recognition*.” This aesthetic struggle can be read as a struggle for *recognition of absolute Spirit* (or a *transcendental signified*, to take a more deflationary stance), in the work of art itself. I would like to couch the thesis in different terms, and see the relationship as one that in art has turned from the *centripetal* to a *centrifugal* relationship of the aesthetic signifier to the signified. Following Gaiger’s descriptive historicism, I would like to argue that in turning Hegel “on his head” we can see that the tensions inherent in the majority of modern art can be subjected to rich exegesis using the Hegelian model, and that this model can also shed light on some of the tensions we recognise in the aesthetic of Romanticism. Further, the dynamics inherent in Hegel’s theory of recognition are also inherent in his philosophy of art. The teleology of Hegel’s social theory can be fruitfully applied to his aesthetic theory, even though this was something never intended (or accomplished) by Hegel himself. In fact, this could even be one of the reasons for the arguably un-unified nature of his aesthetic theory. Finally, the teleology of the aesthetic realm finds itself in the space of *symbiotic alterity* between autonomy and receptivity, which

ultimately haunts Hegel's social theory as well as the Jena Romanticism to which Hegel was so hostile. This tension I will now proceed to examine within the context of English Romanticism, and in so doing draw a narrative line between the disparate poetics and romantic mythologies of Coleridge, Wordsworth and P.B. Shelley.

Notes

1. I am here using the term “acknowledgment” more specifically in Cavell’s sense in that knowledge acquisition, in a similar vein to that of Rorty, is not necessarily a discovery of a truth that is in some way “out there” but an acknowledgment of something previously not *recognised* by a human subject and thus literalised within a pre-existing discourse. This is also a further expansion of recognition beyond that of *Anerkennung* as posited by Hegel. For Cavell’s initial rendering of “acknowledgment” see: Stanley Cavell, “Knowing and Acknowledging” in *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp. 238-266. Patchen Markell further writes of Cavellian acknowledgment: “For Cavell, acknowledgment is different from, but not opposed to knowledge, for it involves acting on and responding to what we know. And that intersection between the order of knowledge and the order of practice is exactly what political theorists have captured by treating “recognition” as at once a kind of cognition *and* a kind of respect: Axel Honneth’s recent argument that recognition involves something “added to the perception of the person”—namely an “affirmation” makes this point clearly. But Cavell’s move from knowledge to acknowledgment involves more than this. It is not just a move of supplementation, in which something belonging to a different order—that of normativity—is added to, and articulated onto, knowledge. It is also a move that aims to change our understanding of the relevant “knowledge” itself: of what it means to know, and of what kind of knowledge we need to have in order to take the further step of acknowledging others.” Patchen Markell, *Bound by Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), pp. 34-35. It is in this sense that Wordsworth adds to existing experience of the natural world, not in the sense of acknowledgment between two agents. Wordsworth “acts on” and responds to his experience of the natural world and in so doing formulates further knowledge of the world, whereas Coleridge remains, in a sense, estranged from acknowledgment, or put another way, *avoids* this acknowledgment and thus retains a spiritual void with regards to the natural world.

Acknowledgment for Cavell is acceptance of our sceptical limitations; a form of knowledge originally postulated as a way of tackling the problem of other minds. Moreover, it can be applied to our knowing of our *own* mind. It is further contrasted with *avoidance*. In terms of Wordsworth and Coleridge, acknowledgment vacillates between in Wordsworth a recognition of nature as laying an organic *claim* upon his whole sense of being—whereas for Coleridge this is *avoided*. It can be argued however, that in this respect Coleridge, in choosing to avoid this organic connection to nature actually possesses the *knowledge* in the first place. He enters however a spiritual void with regard to this knowledge. Further, Cavell claims that our sense of acknowledgment is also down to our recognition of the sceptical limits of our everyday existence—a replacement of philosophical certainty. Whilst in this sense Coleridge could therefore be seen to simply fail to acknowledge the sceptical limits of the everyday in his Romanticism, Wordsworth I argue in this thesis at least *believes* he has transcended these sceptical limitations.

2. G.W.F Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 110-11.

3. H.G. Gadamer, *Hegel's Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies*, trans. P.C. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 57.
4. *The concrete universal* is the term used by Hegel to outline the universal that precedes or makes its parts possible, in contrast to the *abstract universal* which is made possible by the formation of its parts. It corresponds to the scholastic principles of *compositum* and *totum*. For Hegel the *concrete universal* is the universal that contains all within its scope and something only becomes complete when it is recognised as being part of the *concrete universal*. I argue in my thesis for example that Coleridge remains within a divided consciousness that partakes in a conceptualisation of the universal as a *compositum* or *abstract universal*. Therefore his ideal of a universal is something that remains abstract, or outside the elements of his consciousness, or to put it another way is never fully concretised.
5. Hegel's use of Aristotle's *formal-final cause* is interpreted as the Concept (*Begriff*). The formal (or natural cause) is the reason for something's development. The final cause is the *telos* or the realisation of something's inner essence, or its final purpose. These things are linked together in the Concept, which has its *telos* within its formal structure, which necessarily embodies the self-realisation of itself. Hence, the Concept is an instance of the *concrete universal* because it is internally related to the essence of the object, and not external to it, in which case it would be an example of an *abstract universal*. Alfredo Ferrain writes: "Immanent form is for Hegel an *archê* or cause that is not definable in abstraction and isolation; the cause does not also happen to be subject to change, in addition to and independently of its essence. Its very being consists in the process of its own actualization. If the essence of the living being does not exist independently of it, it must then be the form understood as end – Hegel calls this the concept – that moves the living being in the process of attaining to its end or *telos*. Differently stated, in the living being the concept becomes concrete. *Energeia* is what Hegel means by subjectivity, the concept as a cause of its being and movement, or self-actualizing form." In, Alfredo Ferrain, *Hegel and Aristotle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 10.
6. In Fichte we start with the idea of a self-conscious being, but his argument is transcendental, and runs backwards. We need *Anerkennung*, in order for self-consciousness. Hegel guarantees self-consciousness and then moves the subject forward to another *Gestalt*, which guarantees awareness of *Spirit* through an inter-subjective relationship. This then *guarantees* our mediated autonomy-through identity-in-difference.
7. Pippin and Pinkard have recently expressed their "deflationary" readings of Hegel in works such as: Robert Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), *The Persistence of Subjectivity: On the Kantian Aftermath* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) and *Hegel's Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Also, Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Dialectic* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988). For a recent historicist critique of these tendencies see Frederick Beiser, "Dark Days: Anglophile Scholarship Since the 1960s", Espen Hammer (ed.) *German Idealism: Contemporary Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 70-90.

8. Robert Pippin, "What is the Question for which Hegel's Theory of Recognition is the Answer?" *European Journal of Philosophy*, 8:2, (August, 2000), p. 156.
9. Robert Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition* (London: University of California Press, 1997), p. 48.
10. Axel Honneth, for example, has discussed at length the communitarian aspects of recognition in Hegel expressed in early writings such as the *System of Ethical Life* (1802) that in his view are superseded by more metaphysical questions on consciousness and *Spirit* by the time of his early work on *Realphilosophie* (1803/04). Accordingly, Honneth claims "In this sense, the new (and methodologically speaking, certainly superior) conception found in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* represents, in effect, a fundamental turning-point in the course of Hegel's thought. As a result, the possibility of returning to the most compelling of his earlier intuitions, the still incomplete model of 'the struggle for recognition', is blocked. Accordingly, in the large works that were to follow, one finds only traces of the programme pursued in Jena. But neither the intersubjectivist concept of human identity, nor the distinction of various media of recognition (with the accompanying differentiation of recognition relations), nor, certainly, the idea of a historically productive role for moral struggle—none of these ever again acquires a systematic function within Hegel's political philosophy." Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. Joel Anderson (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1995), p. 63. On my model, I have attempted an *expansion* of recognition into other areas of Hegel's philosophy, whereas on Honneth's reading Hegel is guilty of removing recognition as a central impetus in his work as the price for methodological clarity. Honneth examines the political dimension of recognition by using some of the work of G.H. Meade to expand upon Hegel's earlier, more Aristotelian conception of recognition.
11. Robert Williams, *Recognition: Fichte and Hegel on the Other* (New York: SUNY Press, 1992), p. 77.
12. Besides the work of Robert Williams and Robert Pippin discussed here, for a further discussion of *Anerkennung* in *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, see also: Jurgen Lawrenz, 'Hegel, Recognition and Rights: 'Anerkennung' as a Gridline of the Philosophy of Rights', *Cosmos and History: the Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, Vol. 3, no.s 2-3, 2007: pp. 153-169.
13. G.W.F Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Allen W. Wood (ed.), trans. H.B. Nisbett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 366-67. Hegel refers to recognition at other points in *The Philosophy of Right*, expanding it into the ethical sphere of *Sittlichkeit* as the substance of the modern state. For example, with regards to education he writes: "It is part of education, of *thinking* as consciousness of the individual [*des Einzelnen*] in the form of universality, that I am apprehended as a *universal* person, in which [respect] *all* are identical. A *human being counts as such because he is a human being*, not because he is a Jew, Catholic, Protestant, German, Italian, etc. This consciousness, which is the aim of *thought*, is of infinite importance, and it is inadequate only if it adopts a fixed position—for example, as *cosmopolitanism*—in opposition to the concrete life of the state." p. 240.
14. Frederick Beiser, *Hegel* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 288.

15. Paul de Man, *Aesthetic Ideology* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1996), p. 99.
16. Schlegel's and Novalis' German Romanticism implies a direct connection therefore between the dynamics of the world and the putative subject; a connection that can be discerned in works such as Novalis's "Monolog," wherein the dynamics of seemingly free-associative language reflect the ultimate dynamics of the external universe and human consciousness.
17. For a discussion of the romantics' organic synthesis of Fichte and Spinoza, and their use of Leibniz' *entelechy* in this synthesis, see: Frederick Beiser, "The Paradox of Romantic Metaphysics", Nikolas Kompridis (ed.) *Philosophical Romanticism* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 217-37.
18. F.W. Schelling, quoted. in Beiser, "The Paradox of Romantic Metaphysics," p. 223.
19. The phrase "*deworlde d subjectivity*" is one I have in part adopted from Bernstein's representation of romantic subjectivity in: J.M. Bernstein, "Poesy and the Arbitrariness of the Sign: Notes for a critique of Jena romanticism", Nikolas Kompridis (ed.) *Philosophical Romanticism*, p. 143. Bernstein writes "Aesthetic reason could come to have this privileged position because it could be seen as responding to a profound crisis of reason brought on by the disenchantment and dematerialization of circumambient nature that was the consequence of the mechanization and mathematization of nature by the new science, on the one hand, and the deworlding (and dematerialization or disembodiment) of freedom and subjectivity that arose as the necessary saving response to the loss of nature as habitat, on the other."
20. When Hegel speaks of Post-Reformation art, he emphasises the importance of painting as manifesting free Spirit (and human freedom) in terms of colours, particularly in the secular age of modernity. Hegel particularly admired the Dutch masters.
21. Particularly in the debate over the authenticity of Heinrich Gustav Hotho's two-volume edition of the *Aesthetics*. Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert has recently questioned the authenticity of these translations to Hegel's original thought—which is allegedly much less structured than Hotho gives credit for. It is also claimed that Hotho actually supplements the lectures with his own material. For a more detailed discussion of these scholarly issues see: Jason Gaiger, "Catching up with History: Hegel and Abstract Painting", Katerina Deligiorgi (ed.) *Hegel: New Directions* (Chesham: Acumen, 2006), pp. 159-164.
22. G.W.F Hegel, *Hegel's Lectures on Fine Art: Volume I*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 69.
23. G.W.F Hegel, "Philosophy of Art", *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (556-563), <http://www.hegel.net/en/enz3.htm>
24. G.W.F Hegel, "Philosophy of Art", <http://www.hegel.net/en/enz3.htm>
25. For Hegel's discussion on love, see: G.W.F Hegel "Two Fragments of 1797 on Love", trans. H.S. Harris, *CLIO*, 8:2, 1979: pp. 257-65.
26. Stephen Houlgate, "Hegel and the "End" of Art", *The Owl of Minerva*, 29:1, 1997. (Fall), p. 7.
27. Beiser, *Hegel*, p. 292.

28. F.W. Schlegel, quoted. in Allen Speight, "Friedrich Schlegel", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2008 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/schlegel/>>.
29. Margarete Kohlenbach, "Transformations of German Romanticism 1830-2000", Nicholas Saul (ed.) *The Cambridge companion to German Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 265.
30. Manfred Frank, "Philosophy as 'Infinite Approximation': Thoughts Arising out of the 'Constellation' of Early German Romanticism", Espen Hammer (ed.) *German Idealism: Contemporary Perspectives*, p. 300.
31. G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on Fine Art: Volume 1*, p. 75.
32. F.W. Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments*, trans. P. Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), p. 175.
33. Schlegel, p. 189.
34. This could once again, as Beiser argues with regards to *entelechy* in romantic organicism, in "The Paradox of Romantic Metaphysics" be down to the influence of Leibniz on the romantics. Leibniz' theory of monadology also presupposes that the monads that constitute the universe have a separate existence and yet react with one another in order to generate the entelechy central to his metaphysics. See G.W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Writings*, trans. Mary Morris and G.H.R. Parkinson, (London: Everyman, 1995), pp. 179-194.
35. Bernstein, "Poesy and the Arbitrariness of the Sign: Notes for a critique of Jena romanticism", p. 146.
36. Bernstein writes of the poststructuralist inheritance of this romantic paradox: "Eschewing aesthetic semblance, the romantic fragment becomes philosophical idea. Both de Man and Blanchot, in wanting to get to the non-meaning that is the condition of meaning, call it text machine, call it event, must displace, forever, the fragile aesthetic object and replace it with, however mediated and detoured, philosophical knowing, the knowing of non-knowledge." Bernstein, pp. 167-68.
37. Fred Rush, "Irony and Romantic Subjectivity", Nikolas Kompridis (ed.) *Philosophical Romanticism*, p. 189.
38. Rush, p. 187.
39. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 485.
40. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 51.
41. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 52.
42. See: Arthur Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997)
43. Jason Gaiger, "Art as Made and Sensuous: Hegel, Danto and the 'End of Art'", *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain*, Nos. 41/42, 2000, p. 107.
44. Gaiger, "Art as Made and Sensuous: Hegel, Danto and the 'End of Art'", p. 112.
45. Gaiger, "Art as Made and Sensuous: Hegel, Danto and the 'End of Art'", p. 113.
46. Gaiger, "Art as Made and Sensuous: Hegel, Danto and the 'End of Art'", p. 113.
47. Robert Pippin, *The Persistence of Subjectivity: On the Kantian Aftermath* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 292.
48. Pippin, *The Persistence of Subjectivity*, p. 300.

49. Katerina Deligiorgi, "Modernity with Pictures: Hegel and Gericault", *Modernism/Modernity*, Baltimore: Nov. 2007, Vol. 14:4, p. 616.
50. Deligiorgi, p. 611.
51. The demands of "tradition" on the artist was also famously outlined in the context of high modernist aesthetics by T.S. Eliot. See T.S. Eliot "Tradition and the Individual Talent", David Lodge (ed.) *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism: A Reader* (London: Longman, 1972), pp. 69-77.
52. Houlgate, p. 8.
53. Houlgate, p. 8.
54. G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on fine Art: Volume 2*, trans. T.M. Knox, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 972.
55. Stephen Houlgate, "Hegel and the Art of Painting", William Maker (ed.) *Hegel and Aesthetics* (New York: SUNY Press, 2000), p. 67.

Chapter Two

Philosophy, Theology and Intellectual Intuition in Coleridge's Poetics

1. Introduction

In this chapter I use the explanatory framework I developed in Chapter 1 to examine the vacillation between receptivity and autonomy as experienced in the work of Coleridge. This vacillation manifests itself in Coleridge's work in an inherent tension between receptivity to the external world and an aesthetic autonomy—an *aesthesis* whereby the subject formulates a work of art, which provides an independent intellectual intuition of the infinite and in so doing produces a self-sustaining, balanced and organic work of art—or a 'deworlde'd' work. This tension between a *contingent* 'deworlde'd subjectivity' and an associationist psychophysical parallelism, whereby the subject is of necessity bound to the sensible world, is never really resolved during his lifetime. In terms of his philosophical response to the post-Kantian philosophical landscape, Coleridge famously attempted (and failed) to formulate an epistemological foundationalism in chapter thirteen of the *Biographia Literaria* (1817). His aim there was to argue for an intuitive status for the imagination, which would transcend the dualism of the *noumenal* and the *phenomenal* world. However unsustainable Coleridge's foundationalist hopes for the romantic imagination, these ideas provide us with an interesting perspective from which we can approach his poetry; that is, in terms of a generative tension between an absolute idealism and an empirical-realism, or between imaginative autonomy and receptivity to the external world. This tension is also partially characterised in Coleridge's poetry by the tension between *symbol* and *allegory*.

I begin by assessing Coleridge's metaphysics, and his philosophical attempt to transcend the dualistic ontology of Kant in order to cognise a pure intuition to act as

a basis for his theosophy.¹ I will then discuss four of Coleridge's canonical poems, "Kubla Khan" (1797), "Frost at Midnight" (1798/1834), the third version of "Dejection; An Ode" (1817) and "Constancy to an Ideal Object" (an early poem of uncertain date of composition), (1828). These poems illustrate firstly Coleridge's philosophical dialectic at different stages of development and secondly the poet's struggle for a unifying state of recognition between his mind and the external world—*aesthetic recognition*. I argue that paradoxically the strength of the poetry is derived from the aporia inherent in his metaphysical position; what I term the unavoidable and *symbiotic alterity of receptivity and autonomy*. The rationale for commencing with a reading of "Kubla Khan" is not only to do with dates (it is conjectured to have been originally composed in October 1797); I also feel that Coleridge's philosophical optimism is at its strongest at this early stage in his poetic career and he feels closest to the intellectual intuition he seeks through the medium of *poesy*. Moreover, by the time he composes "Frost at Midnight" in 1798 his consciousness has vacillated towards a more receptive position—a position given over to his earlier *associationism*. By the time of the composition of "Constancy" Coleridge has lost all faith in a pure, intellectual intuition. I further outline throughout the chapter how this philosophical reading of Coleridge's work offers a stronger and more cohesive one than that of other critical readings.

2. Coleridge's philosophical dichotomy

Coleridge was inherently troubled by a philosophical divide between receptivity to the world in terms of an associationist *compositum* on the one hand, and an organic *aesthesis of a totum* that arises from the subject's creative imagination, permitting the subject to partake in the infinite. He acknowledges that philosophical unity is an ideal, whilst constantly searching for access to this absolute, which throughout his

philosophical career remained something he never fully realised. As he states in an early notebook entry:

How the *one can be many!*...It seems as if it were impossible; yet it *is* - & it is every where! – It is indeed a contradiction *in Terms*: and only in Terms! – It is the co-presence of Feeling & Life, limitless by their very essence, with Form, by its very essence limited – determinate – definite.²

Coleridge is clearly faced with a divide between what may be called on the one hand, his imaginative experience of the world, and on the other his cognitive experience of the empirical world. His philosophical position had already been heading in a metaphysical direction during his time at Cambridge, and this was further cemented by his experiences and the texts he collected during his trip to Germany with the Wordsworths in 1798/9.³ The influence of German metaphysics contrasted with the earlier influence of the associationism of David Hartley, which was grounded on a psycho-physical parallelism whereby the mind correlates to the workings of the nervous system. Indeed, this is one of the reasons for the tension in Coleridge's work. On the one hand he never completely gave up the psychological associationism of Hartley, which is arguably manifested in his conception of the mechanical fancy as opposed to the organic imagination; on the other he was influenced by the organicist German metaphysics that eventually dominated his intellectual life. The atomistic nature of associationism would be superseded, (albeit never completely) by the organicism of Schelling's philosophy and the romantic reception of Kant's regulative organicism⁴. This would lead to Coleridge's conception of the universe becoming much more holistic than that of Hartley. In a letter Coleridge wrote:

Those who have been led to the same truths [of knowledge] step by step through the constant testimony of their senses, seem to me to want a sense which I possess—They contemplate nothing but *parts*—and all *parts* are necessarily little—and the universe to them is but a

mass of *little things*... I have known some who have been *rationally* educated, as it is styled. They were marked by a microscopic acuteness; but when they looked at great things, all became blank and they saw nothing—and denied (very illogically) that anything could be seen.⁵

And in *Aids To Reflection* he writes:

In the world we see every where evidences of a Unity, which the component parts are so far from explaining, that they necessarily pre-suppose it as the cause and condition of their existing *as* those parts; or even of their existing at all... That the root, stem, leaves, petals, &c. [of this crocus] cohere to one plant, is owing to an antecedent Power or Principle in the seed, which existed before a single particle of the matters that constitute the *size* and visibility of the crocus, had been attracted from the surrounding soil, air, and moisture".⁶

Interestingly, one can see a totalising conception here similar to that of Hegel's concrete universal and formal-final cause, where the conceptual whole precedes its parts;⁷ an imaginative conception that would however continually falter in the space of Coleridge's poetry and philosophy due to the remaining influence of psychological associationism, which seemed continually to play a philosophically active role in his work. Meyer Abrams describes Coleridge's own organic system thus:

The dynamic conflict of opposites, and their reconciliation into a higher third, is not limited to the process of individual consciousness. The same concept serves Coleridge as the root-principle of his cosmogony, his epistemology, and his theory of poetic creation alike. This is the point that Coleridge tries to make in his cryptic and oft-ridiculed comment: "The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former..." All genuine creation—everything that is not a mimicking of given models, or a mere reassembly of given elements into a whole which is novel in its pattern but not in its parts—derives from the generative tension of opponent forces, which are synthesized, without exclusion, in a new whole. The imagination, in creating poetry, therefore echoes the creative principle underlying the universe. In this totalising metaphysical system, the imagination, at work in poetry, reflects the production of the 'infinite I AM.'⁸

Coleridge's theological concerns with Christianity⁹ and his theosophical cosmology here combine with the early Schellingian influence at work in his philosophy, which I discuss below, whereby the aesthetic act of creation reproduces the creative drive within nature, and ultimately of *Yahweh*—thus giving the human mind an ontological portal into the otherwise *noumenal* world. This is Coleridge's use of the modified doctrine of *natura naturans* which Schelling himself had appropriated from Spinoza and which forms the basis of his famous *Naturphilosophie*. Andrew Bowie claims of Schelling's use of this scholastic principle:

The essential idea of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* is that, in the same way as the I of self-consciousness is both active and yet can try to reflect upon itself as an object, nature is both actively 'productive' (in the sense of Spinoza's *natura naturans*) and is made up of objective 'products' (*natura naturata*). The understanding deals with transient 'products' and is consequently confined within the limits of determinate cognition; *Naturphilosophie* tries to theorise nature's 'productivity', without which there would be no products, and thus goes beyond what science can know, which is always particular and finite, to what is 'infinite'.¹⁰

In Schellingian terms, access is granted to the *natura naturans* through the process of identification with unconscious natural processes through the conscious productivity of our mind. For Coleridge the theologian, the modified 'infinite I AM' is reproduced in the imagination and gives the thinking subject (in the guise of the poet/philosopher) access to the infinite. In fact, Coleridge uses the concept of *natura naturans* in a much closer way to the original scholastic use of the term, whereby we have intellectual access to God through the *natura naturans*.

Schelling himself originally viewed art as supplying man with the means for an intellectual intuition of the infinite productivity of nature, because art is both *conscious* in the production of the artist and *unconscious* as an expression of the infinite unconscious driving force of nature. The early Schelling attempts to allocate a pure autonomy or aesthesis in art, because it organically exemplifies the workings

of the *natura naturans* within the process of aesthetic production itself, (a position which was ultimately destabilised and shifted throughout his own career). Later in his career Schelling himself explicitly acknowledged his inability to justify his notion of intellectual intuition, whether in aesthetics or in simple *Naturphilosophie*:

...our self-consciousness is not at all the consciousness of that nature which has passed through everything, it is precisely just *our* consciousness [...] for the consciousness of man is not the consciousness of nature[...] Far from man and his activity making the world comprehensible, man himself is that which is most incomprehensible.¹¹

The importance of this inherent tension in Schelling's idealism is based upon the apprehension of an intellectual intuition, a stance firstly of philosophical autonomy, whereby the thinking subject gains pure access to the infinite, and secondly, *a fortiori* in terms of aesthetics through an experience of *pure aesthesis*, whereby the subject experiences the infinite in and through the productive work of art. This dialectical tension between an unmediated experience of the infinite and a mediated and receptive aesthetic experience is a tension not only inherited by Coleridge but also a rupture openly countenanced by Coleridge in his work and letters after the *Biographia*. Coleridge's disenchantment with Schelling's idealism, in particular the "identity-philosophy" first introduced in the 1803 revision of the *Philosophy of Nature*, was something that haunted his own attempts at translating speculative metaphysics into his own theosophical system. The aporetic nature of Schelling's system was due to the system's latent Spinozism and failure to establish a *transcendental intellectual intuition*. According to Tim Milnes:

This was one of the principal causes behind Coleridge's later disenchantment: Schelling's self-identical absolute threatened to revert back into an unwelcome Spinozism with its static universe and impersonal God. Consequently, Coleridge was left momentarily stranded, unable to follow Schelling into the dark identity of his later work, but having accepted (against Kant's advice) that philosophy must find the unconditioned and (against Fichte's) that this

unconditioned lay in the union of the self with an ontological other that was not just a reflex “I,” a postulation of the self. In this light, Coleridge’s metaphysics of absolute will can be seen as an attempt to reconcile Fichtean voluntarism with a Schellingian absolute idealism in order to produce a total theosophy of purposeful freedom.¹²

This failure of reconciliation between an absolute conception of the autonomous self and a static, deterministic-Spinozist universe, was the metaphysical dilemma that buffered Coleridge. Therefore a tension resided between a Hartleyan *receptivity* to the external universe, resulting in a dualistic and receptive *psycho-physical parallelism* and the need for an *absolute autonomy* of “purposeful freedom.”

Coleridge shared Hegel’s conceptualisation of art’s inferior position to philosophy and religion and in later writings openly shared Hegel’s misgivings of Schelling’s intellectual intuition. The central problem for Coleridge was that as a Christian philosopher he ultimately could not take the next step of placing philosophy in a higher relation to religion, something which enabled Hegel (even as a Christian philosopher) to place dialectical reason in the position of *Ousia*. In *The Letter to Green*, Coleridge adumbrates the reasons for his final break from Schelling, and his own detachment from the position he had unsuccessfully attempted to outline in the *Biographia*. In the letter Coleridge explicitly outlines his objections to Schelling’s intuition, which he argues *derives from* experience and is at the same time *responsible for experience*, as Coleridge has it:

...If his position, that a Principle of Natur-philosophie, belonging to Physics, and yet notwithstanding this a Principle strictly a priori, nay, an absolute principle, can involve it’s [sic] own necessity and be properly self-evident—if (I say) this Position were true, we should have a right to infer, dass die Natur-wissenschaft musse der Erfahrung . . . ganz und gar entbehren können [that natural science can do without experience altogether]: and the following sentence, all in Italics, is but a paltry evasion grounded on a mere equivocate of the word, Experience. . . . But the Position is false, false in it’s [sic] first grounds—and being a fundamental Position, it weakens the whole Superstructure. Our second point therefore is eine Voraussetzung relativ der sinnlichen Natur, oder der Natur in der Welt, kann nicht

ihre Nothwendigkeit in sich selbst tragen—kann gar keine absolute Nothwendigkeit haben [a presupposition relative to sensible nature, or nature in the world, cannot carry its necessity within it- self—can have absolutely no absolute necessity]. It is an Anticipation that acquires necessity by becoming an IDEA. . . . I need not point out to you, my dear Green! the practical Importance of this Correction. For as it stood in Schelling, the necessity of resorting to Experience is a mere assertion in contradiction to the assertion preceding—and so annulled by it ...¹³

Coleridge shares Schelling's later misgivings with his total system and with the ontic status given to the intellectual intuition. However, also in line with Schelling, Coleridge retains the residual tension between an experiential receptivity and a complete autonomy by clinging to Schelling's programme, if not the actual results of the programme. Ayon Roy has argued that in his inability to ultimately free himself of the idea of an intellectual intuition and a conceptualization of absolute autonomy, Coleridge finds his main difference from Hegel, who rejects the intellectual intuition outright.¹⁴ As Hegel himself said of Schelling: "The deficit in Schelling's philosophy is that he places the point of indifference of subjective and objective at the beginning; this identity is set up absolutely, without it being proven that this is the truth."¹⁵ For Hegel this needs to be worked out in the form of reason, through his teleological dialecticism, and is not something to be postulated as an intellectual intuition.

According to Roy, implicit in Coleridge's criticism of Schelling is a proto-Hegelian position, which is only not fully worked out because of his own requirement for foundationalism, or an intellectual intuition:

Coleridge suggests that in the unfolding of the principle itself, it (absolute knowledge) can thereby "acquire" necessity. This is nothing other than Hegel's "phenomenology of spirit" as described earlier, in which the Absolute is earned only at the end of spirit's journey through the various imperfect stages of knowledge. Crucially, in the final turn of Coleridge's criticism of Schelling, he suggests that construing the "Voraussetzung" as "an Anticipation that acquires necessity" is precisely the dialectic of actual

“Experience” (as opposed to Schelling’s “mere assertion” of “Experience”). [...] In his marginalia to Schelling’s Introduction to the Sketch of a System of the Philosophy of Nature, written at about the same time that he wrote the letter to Green, Coleridge emphasizes, “It is not the doctrine itself that I am here blaming but the method.” I would suggest that this remark can be fruitfully applied to Coleridge’s stance toward Schelling’s foundationalist intuitionism: Coleridge shares Hegel’s skepticism about Schelling’s foundationalist methodology but he sides with Schelling against the mature Hegel in retaining the category of intuition itself.¹⁶

Coleridge’s desire to retain the intellectual intuition, his desire to place imagination in the *noumenal sphere*, is what severs his ability (or intent) to subscribe to the project of Hegelian dialecticism. I believe this is mainly due to Coleridge’s position as a Unitarian minister, in consequence of which Coleridge could not allow reason to subvert his Christian topography. Hegel’s conceptualisation of reason and philosophy allows his stratification of art-religion-philosophy; this in turn enables Hegel to dispense with any foundationalist metaphysics, because reason (or *Spirit*) itself as the monistic *Ousia* displaces religion as a mere stage within the overall system.

3. Coleridge’s theological escape from aporia

In a possible reaction to the philosophical impasse at which he found himself, the later Coleridge switched his Christian position. He moved from a Unitarian position to a Trinitarian position; this I feel stemmed from his dissatisfaction with his own failed attempt to formulate an intellectual intuition, which would have given the subject self-legislation *and* an ontological union with a Christian deity. Coleridge’s earlier Unitarian theosophical position had been underpinned by a combination of Spinoza’s monism and Leibniz’ *monadology*, supplying him with an entelechy in an otherwise dead universe, and redressing the position of ‘deworldeed subjectivity’ outlined in the previous chapter. Indeed, Coleridge had further been influenced by

the Neoplatonism of the British philosopher Cudworth. According to Jonathan Wordsworth:

Coleridge's own source in 1796 had been not Leibnitz but Cudworth, the slightly earlier English neo-Platonist under whose influence he had written the *Lectures on Revealed Religion* in the previous year. Cudworth's immense, and immensely learned book, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, is an attack on 'hylozoic atheism'—the belief that matter has life. Like Leibnitz he had dealt in terms of separate plastic powers; as a Unitarian, however, Coleridge had joined them up, turned them into component parts of the mind of God. It is this kind of thinking that lies behind the *Biographia* definitions.¹⁷

Coleridge delineated his various philosophical influences and subsumed them under his own theological position, which was originally Unitarian, in order to elaborate his theosophy. However, after the failure of his philosophical foundationalism he actually reoriented his overall schema of art-philosophy-religion and changed his theological position (based upon his philosophical aporia) to one of Trinitarianism. This affected Coleridge's philosophical (or theosophical) position, post *Biographia*. However, if we use the *telos* inherent in Coleridge's own organic argument, it can be argued that the germ for this schism was always alive in Coleridge's imagination, and also informed the *symbiotic alterity* in his strongest poetry even between 1798-1802. Jonathan Wordsworth also suggests that Coleridge had gone through stages of adopting aspects of Jakob Boehme's mysticism and Schellingian pantheism before rejecting these positions outright after the failure of the *Biographia* to establish a secure foundationalism for his metaphysics:

Boehme had enabled Coleridge to go on believing that the experiences of spiritual transcendence celebrated in his own and Wordsworth's earlier poetry had been a losing and finding of the self in God. Such moments are no less important to the Coleridge of 1818, *but he sees them as visitings of the Holy Spirit bestowed by God upon his creature man*. Deific energy in man himself, variously defined as love, joy, the pure reason, the primary imagination is now denied. Or, to put it another way, the soul loses its status as a monad

of the infinite mind. Aspiration goes, to be replaced by duty. The ladder that has offered an Ascent of Being is pulled away.¹⁸

By adopting a Trinitarian position, the later Coleridge moves away from the Unitarian principles of his earlier faith, and the implied pantheism of his earlier Schellingian metaphysics. In one sense therefore, Coleridge adopted a stance which in Hegelian terms, (in light of Williams' reading of Hegel in the last chapter) places the human subject *back* into a passive position in the master-slave relationship with a *Judaeo-Christian God*, and in so doing takes a metaphysical step back, towards a form of quietism, and away from speculative metaphysics. This is perhaps reflected in Coleridge's later retirement from public life, during which he allegedly lived an almost hermetic existence at Highgate. Coleridge's theological convictions offered him a way out of the impasse that he found his philosophical concerns ensconced him within. For Coleridge the 'infinite I AM' eventually became a theological passkey into an experience of the infinite, partly through the symbolical language of the bible—through the linguistic medium of the symbol—something which I shall discuss in more detail in analysing Coleridge's poems below.

The divide within Coleridge, always inherent in his work, also appears to manifest itself in an almost Cartesian dualism. Coleridge's spiritual life entailed an implicit estrangement from nature.¹⁹ This was an estrangement implicit in his work due to his struggle for cognitive recognition in and through external nature and his alienation from nature; it is also implicit in his move from a Unitarian position to a Trinitarian position and his struggle to deliver identity through an ontological difference. Indeed, for Coleridge the search for recognition actually becomes deeper as his intellectual, philosophical and spiritual life progresses. The "esemplastic" imaginative faculty ironically fails Coleridge and there is no ultimate "coadulation" in his metaphysical system, and consequently no autonomy or intellectual intuition.

Coleridge's uncertainty about his relationship to the external world can be discerned in many passages of his notebooks; in one such famous passage he claims:

In looking at objects of Nature while I am thinking, as at yonder moon dim-glimmering thro' the dewey window-pane, I seem rather to be seeking, as it were *asking*, a symbolical language for something within me that already and forever exists, than observing anything new. Even when that latter is the case, yet still I have always an obscure feeling as if that new phaenomenon were the dim Awakening of a forgotten or hidden Truth of my inner Nature.²⁰

Clearly in this passage Coleridge is referring to a notion of intellectual recognition; he is seeking recognition in the external world, something that corresponds to his inner nature. It is to Coleridge's poetry as examples of this ongoing and deepening recognitive aporia that I now wish to turn.

4. Symbol and allegory in Coleridge

Coleridge's most important and most celebrated poetry was arguably written between 1797-1806. The poems selected here aptly demonstrate the *symbiotic alterity* of receptivity and autonomy and the generative power of this tension. They further demonstrate a proleptic search for recognition in the external world; a dialectical search that on the one hand presupposes the possibility of an aesthetic representation of autonomy and on the other seeks this *aesthesis* through a vision of the self in the external world, often in the form of allegory. Either way, the *embodiment* of an ideal space is a recurrent leitmotif in all of the poems I will examine here. I will commence my discussion with an examination of the famous discussion of symbol and allegory, which has been expanded on in recent years in romantic criticism.

Coleridge's definition of symbol closely reflected that of Goethe, as did his organic aesthetic as a whole.²¹ The romantic definition of symbol is central to the aesthetic ideology of Romanticism, in that it presupposes, at the level of the purely

symbolical, an *aesthesis* or *immediate intuition* of the infinite, whereas the allegorical signifies a divided, fallen, or alienated consciousness where there is a specialized and contingent link between one signified and an anterior signifier. In Coleridge's criticism, the allegorical partakes of the mechanical faculty of the fancy, which seeks to represent images from empirical data, and as such functions in an *associative* manner.

For Coleridge, the *Hebraic Bible* represents the greatest example of the symbolical at work; the Bible synechdochically partakes of the divinity that is represented in its pages and therefore is highly symbolic. The Bible is in one sense a-temporal and a-historical for Coleridge as it represents eternal truths, which become historicised only through representation. Coleridge adumbrated his theory of symbol in *The Statesman's Manual* in 1816, and said of the Bible:

...its contents [the Bible] present to us the stream of time continuous as life and a symbol of Eternity, inasmuch as the past and the future are virtually contained in the present. According therefore to our relative position on its banks the Sacred History becomes prophetic, the sacred prophecies historical, while the power of and substance of both inhere in its laws, its promises and its communications.²²

However, the realm of the allegorical and mechanical is the realm of contemporary moral knowledge according to the manual, and one for which Coleridge uses the Miltonic metaphor of an undernourished flock who are lacking in the taking of spiritual fortitude from the truly symbolical well of the Bible.²³ Coleridge describes at length the present state of spiritual virtue and attributes this to the allegorical essence of the moral texts and literature precipitating the spiritual crisis gripping Europe:

A hunger-bitten and idealess philosophy naturally produces a starveling and comfortless religion. [...] Now an allegory is but a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language, which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses; the principal being more worthless even than its phantom proxy, both alike

unsubstantial, and the former shapeless to boot. On the other hand a symbol is characterized by a translucence of the special in the individual, or of the general in the especial, or of the universal in the general. Above all by the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal. It always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that unity, of which it is representative. The other are but empty echoes which the fancy arbitrarily associates with apparitions of matter, less beautiful but not less shadowy than the sloping orchard or hill-side pasture-field seen in the transparent lake below. Alas for the flocks that are to be led forth to such pastures!²⁴

Coleridge elevates the Bible above all other forms of literature due to the symbolical nature of its narrative, something that Coleridge was constantly trying to ape in his literary works. The wellspring “within himself” is the imagination in the individual subject that partakes in the divine *Ousia*, inherent, translucently, in the Bible itself. The symbol partakes synecdochically in the *One Life*.

David Dawson has argued for a scriptural reading of Coleridge’s theory of the symbol, and argues that this forms a hermeneutical basis for Coleridge’s general criticism, within a Christian praxis. The self, both in religious life and in the experience of poesy, reflects the infinite divinity of God, or at least epiphenomenally partakes in the infinite. Dawson quotes Coleridge’s “Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit” when illustrating this point:

In fact, the self is only a weak echo of that speaking voice that constitutes its very personhood. Through scripture, ‘the individual is privileged to rise above himself—to leave behind, and lose his individual phantom self, in order to find his true Self in that Distinctness where no division can be,—in the Eternal I AM, the Ever-living WORD, of whom all the elect from the arch-angel before the throne to the poor wrestler with the Spirit *until the breaking of day* are but fainter and still fainter echoes’ (VI.54). [...] These ‘principles’ and ‘ideas’ that scripture proclaims are not the regulative postulates of Kant’s pure practical reason, but rather realities knowable by human ‘conscience’ (reason united with the will and emotions). For Coleridge, reason in the form of conscience, as the image of God in human beings, apprehends a knowledge higher than Kant deemed possible.²⁵

The ability to gain access to the “Eternal I AM” gives the subject an access to a higher knowledge, within the Christian praxis, which for Kantian epistemology is at best only *regulatory*. In fact, Coleridge in this sense would read Kant in terms of allegory—a divided nature that can only have access to an anterior signified ideal though a regulatory and allegorical use of *practical reason*. Whereas Kant would have discourse situated in the apriority of history and temporality, Coleridge holds symbolical discourse to be a-temporal. Using this logic, the later Coleridge solves his epistemological dilemma by subscription to Trinitarian Christian doctrine: through a participation in the Christian infinite one *attains an intellectual intuition*. Furthermore, this losing of the temporal self in the *One Life* or the eternal divinity, and the partaking in the “Eternal I AM” succinctly demonstrates Coleridge’s hermeneutics, giving us a clearer understanding of his ambiguous pronouncements on the primary and the secondary imagination in chapter thirteen of the *Biographia*. The primary imagination of God is thereby echoed in the secondary imagination of the romantic poet. As Dawson also claims:

Because the human imagination as the image of God in human beings is at once creative and created, it can generate literature through its own imaginative capacity, but that capacity remains ultimately subordinate to its grounding in divine creativity. This subordination becomes most evident in the self’s religious need to overcome self-aggrandizement, a need that finds a transformative divine response in the human voices of scripture.²⁶

Dawson’s reading of Coleridgean hermeneutics reads in the same fashion as my earlier theological juxtaposition with Schellingian aesthetics, and for Dawson the Schellingian *natura naturans* model has been displaced by the theological (or theosophical) model, whereby it is the divine imagination of a Trinitarian God that is the ultimate *Ousia*.

Paul de Man famously attacked the symbol/allegory distinction postulated by Coleridge (and Goethe) and claimed this distinction was a *mystification* proclaimed by romantic aesthetic ideology, in order to render its dialectic a-temporal and a-historical.²⁷ For de Man, romantic poetry is truly allegorical in nature, in that one cannot have true a-temporal access to an objective world. He writes of the historical privileging of symbol over allegory thus:

Whereas the symbol postulates the possibility of an identity or identification, allegory designates primarily a distance in relation to its own origin, and, renouncing the nostalgia and the desire to coincide, it establishes its language in the void of this temporal difference. [...] We are led, in conclusion, to a historical scheme that differs entirely from the customary picture. The dialectical relationship between subject and object is no longer the central statement of romantic thought, but this dialectic is now located entirely in the temporal relationships that exist within a system of allegorical signs. It becomes a conflict between a conception of the self seen in its authentically temporal predicament and a defensive strategy that tries to hide from this negative self-knowledge. On the level of language the asserted superiority of the symbol over allegory, so frequent during the nineteenth century, is one of the forms taken by this tenacious self-mystification.²⁸

For de Man, the primacy of symbol is replaced by the temporal structure of language and sign systems, which hold man in a constant state of *différance* when it comes to any symbolical fusion between the linguistic subject and a *noumenal* unity. This is for de Man the origin of irony and what he terms *dedoublement*.

The ideal of temporal entrapment is something echoed by Cyrus Hamlin who claims that the dialectical relationship between subject and object is the central characteristic of what he calls *romantic metaphor*.²⁹ Both de Man and Hamlin relegate symbol to a place of ultimate resort, a transcendent goal that cannot be achieved within poetry itself. For de Man this results in a negative irony, whereas for Hamlin (for whom metaphor replaces allegory) this results in a position of irony

or dialecticism, whereby the subject is constantly driven on by the tension or discontinuity, within the necessarily temporal structurality of the poem itself.³⁰

Ann Mellor argues that Hamlin and de Man have provided critics with a one-sided deconstruction, and that a correct reading of Schlegelian romantic irony demonstrates to us that participation in the *Fülle* is the driving force behind all romantic irony, both through the use of allegory and symbol—this is because *neither* allegory or symbol can actually give us complete aesthetic satisfaction—an *aesthesis* achieved by either would by definition be only temporary as the ironist realizes that he can only reflect the Heraclitean flux of the world which is at the root of being.³¹ According to Mellor the authentic ironist both celebrates and decries his work, hovering between a state of construction and destruction.

For the sake of the philosophical debate, we can define symbol as the sign that gives us an unhampered, unmediated, intellectual intuition. Schlegel himself claims that the language of poetry is a mere copy of the “unformed and unconscious poetry which stirs in the plant and shines in the light, smiles in a child, gleams in the flower of youth, and glows in the loving bosom of women.”³² A poetry therefore of the abundance of the natural world “of which we, too, are part and flower.”³³ This however still implies a gap between the primordial and unconscious poetry of nature and our mimetic copy of this process. Mellor also claims “Even as he enthusiastically generates a symbol in a mimetic representation of life-creating chaos, the ‘sentimental’ or self-conscious ironist must acknowledge the gap between that infinite chaos and his symbol which, being man-made, can only partially render that reality intelligible.”³⁴ This “gap” and all its temporal implications seems to render part of Hamlin’s and de Man’s temporal polemic still viable. Mellor argues that the infinite chaos and flux is represented through poetry, and therefore an

intellectual intuition of the infinite, although necessarily ephemeral, is available through poesy. Mellor further claims that “the finite can never completely reveal the infinite because, if it did so, becoming would no longer be possible and life would cease.”³⁵ This is apodictically true, and consequently the infinite, for de Man, Hamlin *and* Mellor is necessarily inaccessible. Further, if the language of poetry mimetically represents the dynamism that underlies all being, then how do we distinguish between rhetoric that performs as symbol and that which performs as allegory? In one sense we have deconstructed the whole initial opposition between the two modes of discourse, that is, between symbol and allegory. In short, all language renders the flux and dynamism of the universe by its own dynamic nature, and further, never gives us access to an intellectual intuition of the infinite, only constant ‘play.’ This I feel, is the true position that is revealed in the symbol/allegory debate, one of blurred boundaries between symbol and allegory (metaphor), and one that is enacted in the space of Coleridge’s poetry, especially “Kubla Khan.”

Recalling Jason Gaiger’s reading of Hegel’s *Aesthetics* at this point also helps to place the symbol/allegory debate into the context of my overall argument. I cited Gaiger in Chapter One as claiming that “we need to turn Hegel on his head and declare that the true character of art is best captured by the distances, contradictions, gaps, and incompleteness of Symbolic and Romantic art. Herein lies not the breakdown of art as a form of sensuous expression but the source of its continuing strength and vitality.” This argument can further be applied to the symbol and allegory debate. The gaps and dissonances are what in part actually define the poetry as romantic, the reading we gain in turning Hegel on his head and celebrating the gaps between aesthetic signifiers and signified. The romantic age, which gradually debunks Christian art with a more secular art, leads into the stage whereby the

representation is no longer adequate to the ideal, and therefore a centrifugal distance opens up the horizon between the signifier and the signified. On this reading, the classical stage of art is the most *symbolic* in that it displays the anthropomorphic form most suited to the idea. The romantic-modern age of art has opened up the horizon of meaning to such a degree that self-consciousness, *parabasis*, *transcendental buffoonery*³⁶ and irony all find an aesthetic space in which to thrive. For Coleridge, this “gap” is the source of his greatest poetry, and also the dialectical basis of oppositions such as *organic/mechanical*, *imagination/fancy*, *men of absolute genius/men of commanding genius*, *symbol/allegory* etc. His final resource to escape this dialectic is the privileged side of the *italicised* primary hyponyms above, however the hypernyms in this hierarchy are *autonomy/receptivity*, and these terms exist in a symbiotic relationship that drive the dynamic essence of Coleridge’s poetry. Symbol and allegory on my reading of romantic poetry therefore play out in *symbiotic alterity* and translate as autonomy and receptivity. I have attempted an interrogation of the borders between symbol and allegory in my analysis of “Kubla Khan,” below, as I find that the borders of symbol and allegory are the poles that drive this poem itself, and the blurring of these borders can produce exciting poetry.

5. The deconstruction of allegory and symbol in “Kubla Khan”

In this seminal romantic poem Coleridge uses the aesthetic autonomy of the romantic imagination as a *regulative principle*, which however requires a historical and natural context in order to function. As in Hegel’s progressive teleology, Coleridge constructs autonomy through receptivity between the intelligible and the sensible, and due to these binary constraints there is an underlying vacillating tension between a presence and absence of full disclosure of *aesthetic aesthesis* in the poem. To begin with, there is an inherent self-consciousness at work in the poem

itself. Coleridge added his famous framing device describing the conditions of the poem's composition—the stranger having arrived on business from Porlock after he had taken two grains of opium, which denotes the self-consciousness of the work. Here, Coleridge is using a framing device that doubles as a kind of *parabasis* for the poem, something often used in self-conscious and ironic works. Mellor argues that the self-conscious romantic artist hovers between artistic creation and destruction in their work, and one can fruitfully apply this conception to “Kubla Khan”. Mellor goes on to outline Schlegel's concept of *Selbstbeschränkung* thus:

In Schlegel's terms, the ironic artist must constantly balance or “hover” between self-creation (*Selbstschöpfung*) and self-destruction (*Selbstvernichtung*) in a mental state that he calls *Selbstbeschränkung*, a rich term variously translated as self-determination, self-restraint, or self-restriction. Self-determination thus involves the artist in a process in which he simultaneously projects his ego or selfhood as a divine creator and also mocks, criticizes, or rejects his created fictions as limited and false.³⁷

In one sense therefore the artist's work deconstructs itself as it unfolds and this limit, or transcendental play of freedom and constraint, actually informs the overall trope of “Kubla Khan”.

Mellor's reading of the poem, however, suffers from its reliance on romantic irony as a *principle* in romantic criticism. This orients the reader into a more closed reading of the text, without allowing for engagement in a philosophical, and more open reading of the work. For example, after giving a fruitful analysis of the poem, (using romantic irony), Mellor confines the final analysis within the bounds of irony as a presumptive principle at work in the poem as a whole:

By calling the poem “a fragment,” Coleridge guiltily protects himself against the charge of blasphemy, of committing himself personally to the creation of such a miraculous dome in the air. Hostile readers are hereby invited to assume that in the additional lines Coleridge himself would have rejected this vision as irrational or even immoral and affirmed instead their communally shared values of logic and morality.³⁸

Whilst acknowledging that the fragmentary nature of the poem hints at Coleridge's sense of 'limit' with regard to his poetic powers, or with regards to the sustainability of the romantic imagination, at the level of *aesthetic aesthesis*, this does not imply that Coleridge "guiltily protects himself against the charge of blasphemy." Coleridge, through the vehicle of the fragmentary allegory is *celebrating* the fragmentary nature of the romantic imagination in that he at least has partial access to an unsustainable *aesthesis*, whose visions *may return*. The secondary imagination is something that is an epiphenomenon of the primary imagination, and therefore can only reflect (as the dome upon the waves) the dynamic energy of the primary, and as such is *only fragmentary and refractory in nature*. Coleridge, rather than protecting himself is actually *exposing* himself as the exponent of the secondary romantic imagination; however this disclosure of the secondary romantic imagination is self-consciously only fragmentary and fleeting.

Within the poem the stately pleasure dome is a self-conscious structure, self-imposed by the Khan-poet against the forces of history and the natural world, with its own laws and architecture. However, the poem is a self-conscious work, and as such the poet situates the dome within a pastoral landscape, or *hortus conclusus*, in which the poet senses a type of receptivity to the forces of nature, history and tradition; a tradition within which the imagination cannot help but to suffuse its own creative powers. Paradoxically, the original symbolic nature of the *hortus conclusus* in the genre of the *Dream Vision* was a depiction of a garden surrounded by a wall, which symbolised the virginal nature of Mary. For the Khan-poet therefore the pastoral enclosure implies a sense of limit to the fecundity of his imaginative powers. The dome can also be read, in a philosophical sense, as the ultimate symbol, a self-referential creation by the Khan-poet; however, the inescapability of the

pastoral leads to the allegorical *embodiment* of the romantic imagination within a temporal framing device, whereby the symbol is actuated only in relation to another, anterior sign: that of the pastoral.

The allegorical Khan poet cannot stand outside the temporality of time and history, and due to this limitation the poet cannot stand in a position of transcendent percipience. Just as the pleasure dome is set within the bounded grounds of the pastoral *natura naturans*, so the *aesthesis* is not a ‘pure’ intuition, but only a reaction to external forces, and set within the bounds of the pastoral landscape. Importantly, in the traditional *Dream Vision* something *within the dream* usually awakens the dreamer and after the dream there are a few likely interpretations available that will encourage debate about cultural issues of the day. This reading gives the reader a much stronger indication of Coleridge’s direction in “Kubla Khan.” Coleridge *himself* awakens from the dream, and this is important because of the self-conscious structure of the poem; Coleridge is in effect interrogating himself and therefore is awoken by something *exterior* to the dream—the subject cannot normally awaken *himself* from the dream.

The debate for Coleridge is centred on the *possibility* of intuitive truths, which can be realised in and through the romantic, organic, imagination. It gives a hollow victory to the literary critic to constrain the poem’s meaning within the confines of a single romantic-ironic reading, rather than reading the poem as the opening up of meanings and possibilities, which are *actuated* by the romantic-ironic and fragmentary structure of the poem. Coleridge attempts to plunge the reader into a state of philosophic uncertainty within the allegoric structure of the poem itself, which functions in the final instance as a self-referential instance of the philosophic *Sehnsucht* inherent in the poet’s overall corpus. For Coleridge, the relationship

between tradition and the individual talent is allegorised in the generative tension between the “decreed” stately pleasure dome and the ubiquitous pastoral landscape.

6. The antagonists of the imagination in “Kubla Khan”

Initially, Kubla Khan builds the sunny pleasure dome on a hill that leads “Down to a sunless Sea.” (5) and sets up pastoral imagery rife with fecundity. He thus represents the creative power of the organic imagination. However, this initial construction of the dome is soon overshadowed by other forces, such as “Ancestral Voices prophesying War.” (30) These are the voices of history, a nightmare from which the poet cannot awake, a nightmare entailing an associative relationship to the river-like course of history. The poem cannot fully operate at the level of a heterocosm, which is the organic dream of the fully autonomous imagination, and in its own process it deconstructs these oppositions of fecund, organic imagery:

So twice five miles of fertile ground
With Walls and Towers were girdled round:
And here were Gardens bright with sinuous Rills
Where blossom'd many an incense-bearing Tree,
And here were Forests ancient as the Hills,
Enfolding sunny Spots of Greenery. (6-11)

Here, the ambient tone, along with the regularity of the meter gives a sense of harmony and well being, symbolised by the womb-like imagery of a *hortus conclusus* in which the self-conscious poet has found a safe haven in the symbolic dome and its gardens. Then Coleridge follows with imagery of a much darker and primordial power, representing the Schellingian link, through aesthetics, to the unconscious forces of nature. However, the link is less of a settled aesthesis in Schelling's sense, and more of an eruption of a proto-Schopenhauerian will—creating not harmony or euphony but dissonance and cacophony:

But o! that deep romantic Chasm, which slanted
 Down the green Hill athwart a cedarn Cover,
 A savage Place, as holy and enchanted
 As e'er beneath a waning Moon was haunted
 By Woman wailing for her Daemon-Lover: (12-16)

Thus, the Elysian imagery of the first stanza is displaced by a darker description of subterranean activities in a “Chasm” which runs “athwart a cedarn Cover” In this sense the primary imagination is something that eludes conscious control and points to the aesthetic deconstructing itself between a presence and absence of aesthetic autonomy that ultimately cannot sustain itself against the unconscious tide. Thus, the primary imagination is conceived as both constructive and destructive.

Later in the poem the meter becomes once again more harmonious, as if the unconscious forces of nature and history had abated somewhat, giving the poet another opportunity of realising *aesthetic autonomy*, and he addresses the Abyssinian maid:

Could I revive within me
 Her Symphony and Song,
 To such a deep Delight 'twould win me,
 That with Music loud and long,
 I would build that Dome in air,
 That sunny Dome! those Caves of Ice! (42-47)

The poet, in a calm moment of recollection, in the subjunctive voice, alludes to the autonomous imagination again. The Abyssinian maid stands in one sense a poetic muse, and in Coleridge's symbolic vision as the fertile fountain of the Nile, or the cradle of civilisation. This symbol of course presents the poet with the central motif of the poem: on the one hand once again a creation, a genesis, representing that of “the infinite I AM”, and on the other the narrative of history that haunts the poet and sends the poet back to history and the temporal narrative of allegory. The ambiguity of the Abyssinian muse stands in feminine contrast to the poet-Khan—but also stands out as an infinite symbol—the romantic alterity of the female in the romantic

imagination. This fecund symbol is only attainable at certain times, just as is the fecundity of the romantic imagination itself, whereas the Khan-poet presents the secondary imagination in its temporal form, subject to atrophy, decay and history. Further, the images of biblical fecundity and the connection to God are extended with the imagery in the final lines (53-54): “For He on Honey-dew hath fed/ And drank the Milk of Paradise.”³⁹ The allusion to the fertile promised-land in *Exodus* links the poet to the great creator, and Moses his prophet. The poet at the end of the poem stands as the messenger of the Lord, the poetic vessel of the Lord who symbolically echoes the creative spirit of the primary imagination.

If the first stanza creates the tension between the decreed stately dome and the pastoral landscape, the second illustrates the dark nature of the unconscious and primordial forces of temporality and history and their disruption of the stability of the dome. The final stanza derives its imagery from more theological sources, and in so doing echoes Coleridge’s vacillation between *Naturphilosophie* and a deeply theological biblical symbolism. However, the vision is ultimately lost, the possibility of reconstructing the dome is something deferred, yet something that always remains a fleeting possibility, or in the state of an infinite *Sehnsucht*. The poem itself therefore “hovers” in a self-conscious state of *Selbstbeschränkung*, between poles of aesthetic autonomy and receptivity to the primordial forces of nature and history.

With regards to oppositional imagery within the poem, Coleridge structurally unites various discordant images within the poem, which suggest his self-conscious attempt at wielding the organic imagination:

The Shadow of the Dome of pleasure
 Floated midway on the waves;
 Where was heard the mingled Measure
 From the Fountain and the caves;
 It was a miracle of rare Device,
 A sunny Pleasure-Dome with Caves of Ice! (31-36)

There is a lack of a transcendental signified in the poem, which is discernable not only through the constant play of opposition, but in the opaque nature of the dome itself. We learn of the “shadow of the dome of pleasure” reflected “midway on the waves” of the River Alph. Opposites and tensions are generated through a semiotic grid in order to erect a unifying whole. However, the whole creation itself is on the site of the dome, which is only glimpsed as a *trace* in the structure of the language and never fully realised— in “shadow” and only reflected on the river. Thus, the language of the poem fails to fix a transcendental signified, leaving the autonomous imagery to free associate in an almost surrealistic discourse. However, Coleridge wishes to raise his poem above the level of the surrealistic and the purely *oneric*, and brings in the forces of temporality and history, which distort the image of the dome. This is due mainly to the fact that the poem is attempting to insinuate *itself* into the space of autonomy, a space which attempts to feed upon generative symbols rather than direct allegory. Nature, history and time, however, act as the antagonists of the imagination, and help to place the trope within the self-conscious and divided sphere that generates allegory.

In Jerome McGann’s new-historicist reading of the poem, the historical image of Kubla Khan is placed in the collection of symbols to illustrate the corporeal decay of the lifeless world outside the realm of the poetical imagination, illustrating Coleridge’s self-conscious formulation of an aesthetic ideology. As McGann claims:

Ultimately, then, a poem like “Kubla Khan” operates through symbols because both its subject matter and its style are “ideal”. The specific idea (historical) of such a poem is that poetry works at the level of final ideas. Its concrete symbols deliberately forego any immediate social or cultural points of reference in order to engage with its audience at a purely conceptual level. [...] the work compels a non-rational form of assent to a latent structure of ideas; in the end it urges the reader to swear allegiance to the idea of non-rational and unselfconscious forms of knowing.⁴⁰

On this historicist reading, if the poem had indeed deployed more self-conscious forms of knowing, such as in Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey", then the theme and tone would have been allegorical. However, the strength of the philosophical perspective, as I argued above, is that *both* allegory *and* symbol create a generative tension, and both equally lead to an infinite yearning. There is a constant space between aesthetic signifier and signified at work in romantic poetry, which is openly acknowledged in a self-conscious attempt at replication of the primary imagination, such as "Kubla Khan." McGann in fact *himself* bears out the self-representation of the 'romantic ideology' that he criticises in thinkers like Abrams, as he represents the poem in terms of *symbolical discourse*, and in terms of the symbolical discourse that punctuates the heart of 'romantic ideology'.⁴¹

If we take the relationship between allegory and symbol to a standpoint of second-order signification, and once again open up the boundaries between the two, we gain a stronger insight into the poem. If Coleridge takes the working of generative symbols as what we may call in structuralist terms a first order signification, and then sets this process into an allegorical framework, and through allegoric imagery *represents* the symbolic process, we in fact have a second-order signification (allegory) of the first-order process of (symbolic) generation. The poem is, I think, an allegorical representation of the "infinite I AM" or *Yahweh* in the process of the romantic imagination. The binary symbols of the conscious/unconscious, light/darkness, the subterranean/the pastoral are created in order to signify the Schellingian unconsciously productive natural world (or the Coleridgean "infinite I AM") as opposed to the consciously produced work of art, or the imagination-in-progress partaking of the "infinite I AM". These opposing and yet identified forces of the consciously and unconsciously productive are then set to

the allegorical tale of the production of Kubla Khan's dome and the subterranean and primordial tensions of the universe, that wash the dome down river to the "lifeless Ocean" (28). However, this reading of the poem still leaves one with the issue discussed previously with regards to allegory and symbol; both lead the artist to an intimation or approximation of a *possible infinite* by means of a man-made inscription which "can only partially render that reality intelligible," and cannot, even translucently, give us a direct intellectual intuition. Or stated differently, the *process* of the autonomous imagination is *embodied* in an allegorical framework in order to recognise the *possibility* of that freedom. Symbol cannot function unless engaged with the process of allegory; and here the boundaries between the two become once again dissolved.

From another perspective, "Kubla Khan" is more autonomous if it is viewed in purely symbolical terms, without reference to the sensual and if we *attempt* to disengage the discursive link of symbol and allegory. Returning to the idea of Coleridge's poem as an assent to poetic creation and as a heterocosm, (and as such a pure symbol) the truth-value of the images never comes into play, as they indicate the unified truth of the poetic creation itself, or the self-referential technical structure of the work itself. Abrams cites Johann Bodmer and (more particularly) Johann Breitinger in his *Critische Dichtkunst* (1740) as formulating the theory of art-as-heterocosm, which places the work in the realm of a self-sustaining universe:

In such passages, poetic probability has been freed from all reference to outer reality and made entirely a matter of inner coherence and non-contradiction. And by the severance of the poetic universe from the empirical universe, we achieve the logical distinction between two kinds, or 'universes' of truth.⁴²

Of course, for Coleridge the metaphysician, although his poem can be placed in this historical context, his philosophical requirement is for a more grounded,

foundational attachment to the “infinite I AM.” Bodmer and Breitinger cite the philosophy of Leibniz, in which God has infinite choices available when creating, and uses the materials to form a unified, well-balanced world. The poet, following the same procedure, has only a finite number of choices from the phenomenal world, and will look to make the most well balanced work of art. This is the process of production explored by Coleridge in “Kubla Khan”; however, the discordant tensions that deconstruct themselves and drive the work offer him no foundation for his wider philosophical aims. This therefore leads us back to the inherent tension and irony that haunts a “fragment” such as “Kubla Khan”. If there are two universes of truth, then Coleridge is once again left with an ontological aporia. He is thrown once again back into dualism, this time a Leibnizian brand of *psychophysical parallelism*, as opposed to his desired monistic, organic, totality. The perspective of psychophysical parallelism paradoxically feeds back into the sense of allegory that dominates the poem, the sense of a divided consciousness that can only represent a metaphoric, anterior, and parallel universe: the primary imagination as embodied by *Yahweh*. The direct, symbolic, organic, intuitive connection Coleridge seeks is unattainable, or at least only functions in a symbiotic relationship with the allegorical mode of representation, or is a form of autonomy only attainable through receptivity.

One final opposition is also discernable in “Kubla Khan”, between that of the “man of commanding genius” and the man of “absolute genius.” John Beer⁴³ discusses the poem in terms of this distinction laid out by Coleridge in the *Biographia* and applies this theme in the context of “Kubla Khan” to Wordsworth. In comparison to men of commanding genius, such as Kubla Khan, Beer claims:

Men of absolute genius, by contrast, can ‘rest content between thought and reality, as it were in an intermundium of which their own living spirit supplies the *substance*, and their imagination the ever-varying *form*’ (*BL*, 1, p. 32). Applying this formula back to *Kubla Khan*, it will be evident that it expresses well the distinction between the kind of genius displayed by Kubla Khan in the first two stanzas and that of the inspired genius in the last.⁴⁴

Indeed, if we further read Coleridge’s description of the man of commanding genius in the *Biographia*, we see strong similarities in the imagery used between this passage and “Kubla Khan”:

These [impressed ideas on the world without] in tranquil times are formed to exhibit a *perfect poem in palace or temple or landscape-garden*; or a tale of romance in canals that join sea with sea, or in walls of rock, which shouldering back the billows, imitate the power, and supply the benevolence of nature to sheltered navies; or in aqueducts that, arching the wide vale from mountain to mountain, give a Palmyra to the desert. But alas! In times of tumult they are the men destined to come forth as the shaping spirit of ruin, to destroy the wisdom of ages in order to substitute the fancies of a day, and to change kings and kingdoms, as the wind shifts and shapes the clouds. (Italics mine).⁴⁵

The man (or Khan-poet) of commanding genius clearly figures in the construction of the dome in a landscape garden. However, the Khan-poet is also only managing to “imitate the power” of nature in the Schellingian sense, or *Yahweh*, in the theological-interpretive mode. These men are subject to the vicissitudes of temporality, corporeality, and history. The men who apparently take communion with the “well within himself springing up to life everlasting” it appears are men who partake in the inner-life. Coleridge also claims:

But where the ideas are vivid, [in the man of absolute genius] and there exists an endless power of combining and modifying them, the feelings and affections blend more easily and intimately with these ideal creations than with the objects of the senses;⁴⁶

The question therefore is whether the man of absolute genius (whether or not Wordsworth) is the man of absolute autonomy, because of the ability to rest in the space between “thought and reality” which translates as the organic (and symbolic)

imagination. Khan in the first two stanzas has been used allegorically to explicate the tension between unconscious and conscious creative forces in this world, and the apparent failure of the self-conscious artist to transcend this opposition. In the final stanza however, the man of absolute genius appears in the subjunctive mood, and with restrictions. We are informed that the speaker wonders if he could “build that Dome in Air” which once again gives a sense of autonomy on the one hand, and the unattainable signified on the other. This correlates with the previously lost or opaque signified reflected in and floating on the waves in stanza two. And as Kubla Khan’s “stately Pleasure-Dome” was “girdled round” with “Walls and Towers” so the people at the end of the poem are entreated to imprison or limit the imagination of the poet/prophet “Weave a circle round him thrice/ And close your eyes with holy Dread.” (51-52). The sense is of a character that, even *if he existed*, could not be countenanced by humanity. Or we can read this in poststructuralist terms in the sense of a transcendental signified, an ideal, something which would/could give us the ultimate *aesthesis*, if only we could conceive of it, outside of our signifying systems, with which we would “Weave a circle thrice.” Either way, the concept of *absolute genius* appears inaccessible within the trope of this great poem.

Finally, “Kubla Khan” is a powerful attempt at an evocation of ultimate aesthetic autonomy and in attempting this feat Coleridge encounters romantic irony; however, the irony posits more of an open possibility than the closed reading proposed by Mellor. In its dynamics the poem deconstructs itself between on the one hand, ultimate *aesthetic aesthesis*, and on the other a receptivity to language, history and the primordial forces of nature, which are ultimately destructive, or at best, *restrictive*. Viewing the poem in terms of the symbolic and allegorical, we see that working at the level of symbols does not give the artist any metaphysical certainty,

and in the case of “Kubla Khan”, the workings of the symbolic are actually explicated *through and blended with* the allegorical; Coleridge semiotically “crosses” the symbolic and the allegoric, thus deconstructing another opposition. As we are reading the poem in light of Coleridge’s philosophical project as a whole, and through the presence of Schelling (until at least Coleridge’s turn to *Trinitarianism*), we can see no reconciliation of the unconscious forces of nature with the conscious production of the artist. Instead we have an ambivalence without ultimate subject-object identity, or intellectual intuition (although I believe this poem to be the greatest allegorical representation of this Coleridgean/Schellingian ideal); in fact, the instability of the poem lies in its *direct apprehension of this ideal*. The possibility of absolute genius at the end of the poem is even cut off from humanity, and *bound* just like the pleasure dome after its original construction; the artist remains beached on the unavoidable rubric of the *symbiotic alterity* of receptivity and autonomy. This is ultimately represented in an allegory borrowed from history, and as such the *aesthesis* within the poem is embodied within the sensuousness of his receptivity to history, temporality and nature.

7. Coleridge’s ‘unhappy consciousness’ in Frost at Midnight⁴⁷

“Frost at Midnight” is a poem of Coleridge’s which relies on receptivity to the natural world, and in which Coleridge interrogates his own poetic spiritual development in the sense of a *Bildung*. The personal nature of this poem is interesting for the purposes of this thesis as Coleridge here searches for a cognitive-recognition in the natural world. Moreover, this is the poem in which Coleridge comes closest to subscribing to a more associationist aesthetic ideology, in terms of the psychological effect of the external world on the poet’s mind. Therefore, this poem stands in contrast to the radical imaginative aims of “Kubla Khan.” The poem

itself is a cyclical journey of self-discovery, using the trope of crisis autobiography, as Wordsworth does in poems such as “Tintern Abbey” and *The Prelude*. In this conversation poem Coleridge identifies with his baby, Hartley, as Wordsworth identifies with Dorothy in “Tintern Abbey”. Therefore, there is a search for recognition through the *medium* of the aesthetic product.

Jonathan Wordsworth points to the influence on Coleridge’s theory of the imagination of Akenside’s *Pleasures of Imagination* (1744), and in support quotes part of Coleridge’s *Lectures on the Slave Trade* from June 1795:

To develop the powers of the Creator is our proper employment—and to imitate Creativeness by combination our most exalted and self-satisfying Delight. But we are progressive and must not rest content with present blessings. Our Almighty Parent hath therefore given to us Imagination...(Lects 1795, p. 253)⁴⁸

Thus, for the early Unitarian Coleridge, we have the idea of the imagination as “given to us” by God. It is interesting to note how the younger, and more pre-metaphysical Coleridge relies upon God as giving to us the divine boon of imagination. This part of Coleridge, the more theological and pre-metaphysical, is much more at home in the universe, and in “Frost at Midnight” is given spiritual consolation in the language of God the father through the semiotics of the landscape. Coleridge also admired Thomas Burnett’s *The Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1681-9), which he considered “a grand Miltonic romance.”⁴⁹ This text postulated the idea that God’s relationship to fallen man is symbolised by rugged mountains and wild natural spaces, and in fact offers an interesting *theological* conception of the sublime.

The recognition of God in the external world is a stage of recognition more akin to the lordship-bondsman relationship, in that there is no mutuality at this stage for Coleridge; there is a proleptic going-out-of self, but no recognition of self in the

external, in fact there is a *secondary* return to self-recognition in the form of his progeny (Hartley Coleridge). The dialectical movement here seeks recognition not in the self, or in the autonomous imagination, but in the external, pantheistic universe, whereby the poet seeks the “infinite I AM” in the landscape. Of course, in later years part of Coleridge’s rejection of this initial position would be tied in with his rejection of pantheism. As he would claim in his *Philosophical Lectures*, “For pantheism—trick it up as you will—is but a painted atheism.”⁵⁰ This earlier orientation of Coleridge in “Frost at Midnight” however, demonstrates a search for recognition, (which he attempts via the *Bildung* of his aestheticism), and through which in turn he hopes to express a recognition of a great being *in the theodicy of the external world*— a proposition which he eventually abandons. The ambiguity that haunted Coleridge all of his life is best encapsulated in the quote from his notebooks outlined above, “I seem rather to be seeking, as it were *asking*, a symbolical language for something within me that already and forever exists”.

The poem takes the form of three temporal movements, commencing with contemplation, crisis and resolution. It commences with Coleridge addressing his poetic imagination and fancy, in varying degrees, which are weak and flickering, symbolised by the flames on the fire:

...The thin blue flame
Lies on my low-burnt fire, and quivers not:
Only that film, which flutter’d on the grate,
Still flutters there, the sole unquiet thing,
Methinks, its motion in this hush of nature
Gives it dim sympathies with me, who live,
Making it a companionable form, (13-19)

At this point, in the 1798 version of the poem, Coleridge inserts the lines “With which I can hold commune. Idle thought!/ But still the living spirit in our frame,/ That loves not to behold a lifeless thing,/ Transfuses into all it’s own delights” (20-

23), hence the “living spirit in our frame” (the imagination or fancy) gives life to the external world, not reciprocally however, but in a one-way relationship. In the 1834 version however, by which time Coleridge had come to rely more heavily upon his Trinitarian faith, he was much more sceptical and dismissive of this connection and the lines become “Whose puny flaps and freaks the idling Spirit/ By its own moods interprets, every where/ Echo or mirror seeking of itself,/ And makes a toy of Thought.” (20-23). There is at this stage no sense of recognition for the lyric speaker; the spirit that was self-reflexive in the vehicle of “Kubla Khan” has now become, as fancy, allegorical, self-conscious, divided and analytical. This is a prime example of Coleridge in his allegorical form, using a narrative and conversational relationship with the external to illustrate the subtleties of the pre-unifying, internal, and divided consciousness. As McGann claims of Coleridge’s allegorical work:

To Coleridge, allegory was a poetical form which he associated with a divided or alienated consciousness, and he himself resorted to it—most memorably, in his prose piece “Allegoric Vision”—to open a critical and self-conscious view of ideas and institutions. Allegory was not, for Coleridge, a poetic form appropriate to the One life; rather, it was peculiarly adapted to expose and explore critically the world of illusions, divisions and false consciousness.⁵¹

If Coleridge uses allegory in a second-order sense to illustrate the workings of the symbolic and purportedly autonomous imagination in “Kubla Khan”, in “Frost at Midnight” he uses first order allegory to exemplify the consciousness at a *prior* and pre-symbolic stage—he demonstrates what for Hegel in the *Phenomenology* would be the “unhappy conscience”: a consciousness that is divided and critically self-conscious. In the line referencing the film of soot on the hearth “that film which fluttered on the grate” Coleridge is drawing an allusion to the old English belief that this would portend the arrival of a stranger, as Coleridge claimed in his notes to the poem in the first 1798 quarto: “*Only that film*. In all parts of the kingdom these films

are called *strangers* and supposed to portend the arrival of some absent friend.”⁵² In the context of the poem, this is the visitation of the poetic imagination upon the self-conscious poet’s mind, and also a figure in which Coleridge can seek confirmation, or recognition, of his own imaginative autonomy. There is further a sense of rupture in these lines because the poet only thinks he has “dim sympathies with me, who live”, because Coleridge’s conscience is divided and unhappy, and also dislocated from the ideal of the romantic imagination. The imagery of the estranged imagination provides the stanza link to the next section of the poem, where Coleridge claims he “-gaz’d upon the bars/ To watch that fluttering *stranger!*” (25-26), and then dreamt of his childhood in Ottery. Coleridge uses a literal metaphor to exemplify the loss he feels with the actual loss of his own childhood, and the image of “bars” further gives a sense of imprisonment, both literal and metaphorical, both historical and present, to the child and the imagination, which become metonymically identical.

In the second movement, the poem switches aetiologically in his now divided consciousness to his boyhood days after he had left Ottery and was a student at Christ’s Hospital public school. Again he refers to the precarious nature of his imagination, which even then longed for a return to a state from which it had fallen, or recognition of unity in something external—this time a sign from his happier childhood in Devon:

So gaz’d I, till the soothing things, I dreamt,
Lull’d me to sleep, and sleep prolong’d my dreams!
And so I brooded all the following morn.
Aw’d by the stern preceptor’s face, mine eye
Fix’d with mock study on my swimming book:
Save if the door half open’d, and I snatch’d
A hasty glance, and still my heart leapt up,
For still I hop’d to see the *stranger’s* face,
Townsmen, or aunt, or sister more lov’d,
My play-mate when we both were cloth’d alike! (34-43)

Coleridge's "swimming book" is a figure of synecdoche for his school days after he lost his family life in Devon, and became a city-dweller. His tears in the classroom can also be read as a reference to his imagination, whereby the poet is ever divided from the external by the watery, reflective and refracting imagination. The leitmotif of the return of something in which Coleridge can recognise "something in myself" is played out in the lines 39-43 where he hopes for the return or the recognition of something in the external world. Once again however, in the second movement of the poem this hope is not fulfilled for Coleridge: still there is no sense of *aesthetic recognition*.

In the final movement of the poem, Coleridge searches for recognition by projecting his consciousness outward and this time into the future. The symbolic landscape becomes *acknowledged* as sublime, and in the future the child/imagination need not suffer the privation experienced by Coleridge the poet or prodigy. Coleridge firstly projects his consciousness into Hartley's future, and apparently foresees this in the landscape of the Lake District rather than that of Nether Stowey:

But *thou*, my babe! Shalt wander, like a breeze,
By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags
Of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds,
Which image in their bulk both lakes and shores
And mountain crags: so shalt thou see and hear
The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
Of that eternal language, which thy God
Utters, who from eternity doth teach
Himself in all, and all things in himself. (54-62)

In projecting his consciousness proleptically into the future the poet admits a narrative space between himself and the external universe. In so doing he allegorically extricates himself from the bonds of having to await the return of lost childhood and romantic imagination. Moreover, one can also discern early stirrings

of the organic trope at work here: Coleridge himself, through his offspring, will partake in the romantic imagination. However, in projecting his hopes onto his son he still fails to get any immediate aesthetic intuition or deeper imaginative connection with the external universe. His *divided consciousness* seeks an allegorical link to a Unitarian (and pantheistic) conception of the universe through the projection both *into* the future and *onto* his *son's* relationship to the external world. This is a temporal-spatial shift in imaginative consciousness that is grounded in an allegorical, and divided *telos*: grounded in all senses on *receptivity* to the external world. There is a reconciliation or recognition between God and man via the *natura naturans* of nature—however in a Spinozist sense as opposed to Schellingian, in the form of an *intellectual love of God*. In one sense, Coleridge's relationship with God itself travels the same cyclical path of "Frost at Midnight". He commences with the symbolical and pantheist landscape of God, before entering into his idealist phase whereby the dialectical process is switched back upon his own inquiring, philosophical mind, and finally returns to a position whereby God "bestows" the Holy Spirit upon his subject: man. Of course, for Hegel this would be an incomplete ascent upon the dialectic, one of the "stations along the way." In fact, as stated above, Coleridge returns to the stage of *lordship and bondage* in his relationship with God. Therefore, Coleridge will inevitably seek *aesthesis* and recognition in a deeper imaginative journey into his consciousness, one that through an *aesthetic recognition* will give him ultimate imaginative autonomy; this he explores in another famous poem.

8. The aporetic recognition through joy in "Dejection"⁵³

In "Dejection: an Ode" Coleridge famously questions his fledgling imaginative powers, and switches the dialectical struggle back into the realm of his own

consciousness. He realises that the *aesthesis* he seeks is not to be found in receptivity to the sensuous world, or to the language of a perfect deity to be found within that world, but only within the space of his *own consciousness*. The subjective bent was already in full flow for Coleridge at this point; the poem was originally composed as the “Letter to Sara Hutchinson” in April 1802, almost three years after his return from Germany. Coleridge had taken the idea of the imagination to *echo* that of the Creator and manoeuvred his consciousness back into the space it occupied in the imaginative reverie of “Kubla Khan”; however, Coleridge now has awareness of the fact that the fragmentary vision that he sought to “revive” within himself is lost. In one of his earlier letters Coleridge compares the faculty of the imagination to the faculty of the understanding and claims that the operation of the imagination is a truly autonomous faculty, and a reflection of the creative faculty of God, in the same vein as he wrote in *Lectures on the Slave Trade*, nearly seven years previously:

...I believe the Souls of 500 Sir Isaac Newtons would go to the making up of a Shakespeare or a Milton...Newton was a mere materialist—*Mind* in his system is always passive—a Lazy Looker-on on an external World. If the mind be not *passive*, if it be indeed made in God’s Image, & that too in the sublimest sense—the Image of the *Creator*—there is ground for suspicion, that any system built on the passiveness of the mind must be false, as a system.⁵⁴

Coleridge shifts the dialectic back into the realm of the shaping primary imagination, which blatantly castigates empirical receptivity. And in the most famous lines from “Dejection” Coleridge writes:

My genial spirits fail.
And what can these avail
To lift the smoth’ring weight from off my Breast?
It were a vain Endeavor,
Though I should gaze for ever
On that green Light, that lingers in the West.
I may not hope from outward Forms to win
The Passion & the Life, whose Fountains are within. (39-46)

The philosophical rub for Coleridge lies in the fact that without receptivity to the external, he can seek no recognition and without proleptic thought gaining recognition through a return into itself, Coleridge will remain within a philosophical vacuum. Here then we have Coleridge, in the space of his poetry, interrogating the lack of an intellectual intuition that would haunt the metaphysics of both himself and Schelling. Later in the poem Coleridge seems to identify the faculty of the *fancy* with the discursive understanding, and claims they have displaced the creative imagination:

But o! each Visitation
Suspends what Nature gave me at my Birth,
My Shaping Spirit of Imagination!
For not to think of what I needs must feel,
But to be still and patient, all I can;
And haply by abstruse research to steal
From my own Nature all the natural Man;
This was my sole Resource, my only Plan—
Till that which suits a part infects the whole,
And now is almost grown the habit of my Soul! (84-93)

There is an autonomy of spirit that Coleridge allegorically represents in “Kubla Khan”; whereas in “Dejection” Coleridge claims it has been supplanted by “abstruser musings”, which also ironically belong to his own attempted system of metaphysics soon to play such a large role in his intellectual life. Moreover, in this philosophical action he has lost his former power of imagination to the workings of the mechanical fancy.

As in “Frost at Midnight” Coleridge has recourse to recognition in another in order to *partially* remedy his imaginative crisis, and in this version of Dejection the muse is Sara Hutchinson. Coleridge surreptitiously displaces Sara from the original version of the poem, “A Letter to Sara Hutchinson” and replaces the personal with the philosophical, and social. However, at the end of the poem, just as in the

identification with Hartley, he projects his hopes onto Sara, (and in original manuscripts “Edmund” and “Wordsworth”), who is here also presented as the imagination itself:

Joy lift her spirit, joy attune her voice,
To her may all things live from pole to Pole,
Their Life the Eddying of her living Soul!
O simple spirit, guided from above,
Dear Lady! & Friend devoutest of my choice,
Thus may'st thou ever, ever more rejoice! (134-39)

Although the lyric speaker has lost his joy and accompanying imagination in the performative space of the poem, his hopes are *recognised* in another who is to be suffused in joy, and in so being, releases the poet from his self-imposed conscious prison-house. This takes place as with Hartley, through receptivity to the conscious state of another subject. Furthermore, this becomes a *figurative* address to the imagination within the poet's own consciousness—recognition again through the self-conscious work of art of a freedom delivered through receptivity to another subject. The significance of the subject being a baby in “Frost at Midnight” and a female in the final version of “Dejection” gives further evidence of the poet's *organic* trope; both signify growth, fecundity and future hopes. Crucially however, in the first poem the poet seeks recognition in the future hopes of his young son, which is an attempt to transcend what I have called an ‘unhappy consciousness.’ In the second he seeks an existential displacement of his hopes into the woman, who actually becomes an ambiguous female figure in the third version of the poem. “Dejection” therefore gives the impression of the poet as a fallen character, someone who has lost his sense and opportunity for joy. Whereas in the first poem Coleridge projects his hopes onto his son, and therefore instantiates a teleological trope, in the second he *displaces* his hopes. For Coleridge the metaphysician, there is a dialectical move from a form of recognition in the landscape, and through the projected

influence of this onto his son, towards an inner and alienated self, that can only find ideal joy embodied in the alterity of the female.⁵⁵ In fact, the organic trope is actually weakened in this poem as Coleridge is not projecting his hopes for joy on his progeny, but displacing them into the ‘other’—an illicit ‘other’ with whom Coleridge can never form an organic bond. So in this poem Coleridge has a more unhappy consciousness, due to the retreat into his own conscience and the displacement of his hopes. However, this is not the whole Hegelian picture of “Dejection” and we now need to turn to the similarities between Hegel’s and Coleridge’s treatment of love.

In an interesting reading of “Dejection”, John Barth, S.J. comments on the displacement of love in the second version of the poem. The word “love” or “its cognates” appear twenty-one times in the “Letter to Sara” but only once in the final version of “Dejection”, “ironically, ‘loveless’ in line 52.”⁵⁶ For Barth, this is because Coleridge is using love in the sense that we need to open ourselves to a receptivity to the natural world, whereby we gain a sense of mutuality, or as Barth claims:

It is perhaps no accident that in stanza IV this voice is contrasted with ‘the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd’—because we come to see that it is the voice of love, of one who has learned that only if he is open to receive will he be able to give. Had he not opened himself to the voice of nature—first wild but ultimately healing—he would never have found his own voice. But he did find it, and in the closing lines of blessing it is indeed ‘a sweet and potent voice’, newly potent because it now speaks not only out of self-pity but out of loving concern for another.⁵⁷

One can easily discern a reading that supports Barth’s version of love taking the poet out of himself. In contrasting the lines “I may not hope from outward forms to win/ The passion and the life whose fountains are within” with the next line “O lady! we receive but what we give.” (48), one experiences the heart of Coleridge’s Romanticism. This line is traditionally read in terms of the shaping lamp of the

imagination and its effect upon our world.⁵⁸ If we read the lines in the sense of love however, in the sense of the recognition/*acknowledgment* that we receive joy only if we give joy to the world and forge a consequent recognition of ourselves in the world, then we see Coleridge creating a tension in his work. This tension is instantiated in order to force him into the next shape of consciousness. This is the *Gestalt* of cognitive-recognition whereby in seeing *yourself in nature*, in projecting your love into nature, you receive an emancipatory sense of joy. Lines 46-48 of the poem therefore place the poet in the space between receptivity and autonomy; again, the poet accepts the reality of autonomy only through receptivity to the external world.

This reading is even more informative if we consider Hegel's own 1797 *Fragments on Love* and his later development of these ideas into his eventual theory of recognition (*Anerkennung*). Hegel's concept of love, on which he based his ideas on religion, are interesting in the sense of their own fusion of the objective and subjective through a going out of one's self and return into one's self, in the process of which we both externalise the inner and internalise the outer. As Hegel claims when considering love as a basis of true religion:

The essence of the practical Self consists in the going-out of the ideal activity beyond the actual and in the demand that the objective activity should be equal to the infinite—practical faith is faith in that ideal—now faith is positive if that going-out also exists as the demand of equality [...]

The theoretical syntheses become quite objective, completely opposed to the subject—practical activity annihilates the object, and is completely subjective—only in love alone is one at one with the object, it does not command and is not commanded—This love, made by the imagination into an entity, is the divinity; separated man then has reverence, respect for it—for love united within itself; his bad conscience—consciousness of separation—instils fear of it in him.⁵⁹

For Hegel in his conceptualisation of God-as-love there is a blending of objective and subjective, or the emanation of a “unity in difference,” and the original *Spirit*.

This love can be glimpsed in the form of *joy* in Coleridge's 'Dejection', and one can see the going out of one-self and the return to one-self through the marriage metaphor that Coleridge uses in line 49: "Ours' is her Wedding-garment, ours' her Shroud!" The movement is an almost Wordsworthian reciprocation between mind and nature. Hegel's theory of love and religion was conceptually developed into his social philosophy, which included recognition and eventually *Sittlichkeit*. In like fashion, Coleridge develops his personal statement of love for Sara Hutchinson and transmutes it into a more social/philosophical theory of love, whereby one finds an identical reciprocation with the world through giving love and gaining a sense of intellectual recognition through this act.

Coleridge explores this recognition of joy through the experience of poetic creation, through the aesthetic product. Coleridge himself supplies the adjunct to this reading of "Dejection"—in his own words on the purpose of fine art in *On Poesy or Art*:

[art]...is the mediatress between, and reconciler of, nature and man. It is, therefore, the power of humanising nature, of infusing the thoughts and passions of man into every thing which is the object of his contemplation. [...] To make the external internal, the internal external, to make nature thought, and thought nature,—this is the mystery of genius in the fine arts.⁶⁰

Coleridge's dynamic view of art as uniting the internal and external, nature and man, is most perfectly exhibited in the movements within 'Dejection', movements which are seen in terms of an absolute dialectic, which acts as a *punctum* of Coleridge's Romanticism.⁶¹ In light of my philosophical reading, Coleridge is addressing the romantic dialectic and arguing for a resolution of the dialectic through the *process* of art itself—art is the vehicle that carries the dissonances of philosophical experience and is driven in turn by these contradictions. However, art does not have to "humanise nature" so much as it needs to explore the possibility of cognitive-

recognition in the external world. The poet allegorically embodies his aporias in people, in the landscape, and at a meta-level, within the performative space of the poem itself. This embodiment gives shape to the otherwise amorphous body of Romanticism, and in turn *aesthetically visualises* the dialectic. Unfortunately for Coleridge the philosopher, this fails to supply the foundationalist aesthetic intellectual intuition sought for by both himself and Schelling; however, Coleridge begins in the midst of the dialectic, follows the thread of the dialectic, and through his art brings the dialectic into the Hegelian “daylight of being.” For Hegel art has moved through dialectical stages in conjunction with our developing apprehension of *Spirit*, however turning Hegel “on his head” we see the necessary nature of the gaps and dissonances between the work of art and its intellectual signified and *a fortiori* the inability to attain an intellectual intuition. (Hegel would further have held Coleridge to contention on the function of art to bind man to the natural world—this role he reserved for reason). The strength of “Dejection” is a realisation of the dialectical nature of our encounter with the universe, dialectical because through the medium of art we reach a higher stage of understanding our intellectual experience, or *recognise* ourselves in and through the external world—even if this recognition is ultimately philosophically aporetic.

9. Recognitive breakdown in “Constancy to an Ideal Object”

As the title suggests, “Constancy to an Ideal Object” is a meditation on idealism, an idealism that remains for Coleridge transcendental, and therefore in a sense estranged from a direct intellectual intuition within the sensuous world. The poem once again commences with a state of crisis:

Since all that beat about in Nature’s range
Or veer or vanish, why shouldst *thou* remain
The only constant in a world of Change,

O yearning Thought, that liv'st but in the brain?
 Call to the HOURS, that in the distance play
 The faery people of the future Day—
 Fond Thought! not one of all that shining swarm
 Will breathe on *thee* with life-enkindling Breath; (1-8)

Here one notices a switch in Coleridge's trope. If we hark back to the lines in "Dejection", "O' lady! we receive but what we give", then Coleridge has now shifted ontological emphasis onto the ideal thought itself as relying upon a passive receptivity to the sensuous world, "...not one of that shining swarm/ Will breathe life on *thee* with life-enkindling Breath." The adjectival phrase "shining swarm" further connotes a sense of the latent fecundity within the external world. This ontological inversion is due to the fact that Coleridge has once again manoeuvred his dialectical position between receptivity and autonomy, and in this figure the ideal thought needs life *from* the external world. We are returned, therefore, via a different path, to the trope of a sense of recognition and an attempt to synthesise the *intelligible* and the *sensuous*. For Coleridge, this is the leitmotif of "vain hope." The poet demands from "outward forms" something akin to life-enkindling breath, however the only respite from the dialectical struggle is with death: "Till when, like Strangers sheltering from a Storm/ Hope and Despair meet in the porch of Death!" (9-10). In eschatological terms, the only release from the bondage of dialectic is a Christian union with the *Absolute* in death. Unity-in-death would be the space wherein the personified hope (of an intellectual intuition) and personified despair (of romantic *Sehnsucht*) finally meet, and in so doing coalesce. (This is an experience or romantic eschatology similar to that I discuss in Chapter Four regarding P.B. Shelley's elegy "Adonais.")

Coleridge goes on to claim, "SHE is not Thou, and only Thou art She," (12). The capitalised pronoun "SHE" can be read as a reference to feminised nature, or

penetrable “mother nature” and “Thou” can be read as the mind, or more specifically the romantic imagination. Coleridge is claiming, in an associationist sense, that the corporeal and temporal world of nature gives rise to the ideal, whereas the ideal is only an epiphenomenon of the corporeal, and any idealistic conception of the world is bound by receptivity to the external world. He is also self-consciously sacrificing the idea of aesthetic and philosophical autonomy, and therefore denied access to an intellectual intuition. This can also be read as Coleridge sacrificing his concept of the organic imagination to the concept of the mechanical fancy, whereby the poet can only work within the confines of the empirical, and anterior. Coleridge is at this stage acknowledging the philosophical dualism and the aporetic bent in his own Romanticism.

As the poem progresses, the alterity of mind and nature is displaced into a *recognitive aporia*, a yearning for an intersubjective unity, or *Anerkennung*. Coleridge writes:

Yet still thou haunt'st me; and tho' well I see,
SHE is not Thou, and only Thou art She,
Still, still as tho' some dear embodied Good,
Some *living* Love before my eyes there stood,
With answering look a ready ear to lend;-
I mourn to thee and say-"Ah! loveliest Friend!
"That this the meed of all my toils might be,
"To have a home, an English home, and Thee!"
"Vain repetition! Home and Thou are One! (11-19)

He represents not only an ambiguous and *liminal* merging of identities in these lines, but more importantly the search for an *aesthetic recognition* by which he can gain an intellectual intuition. In this poem ambiguity also haunts the pronominal references because Coleridge has placed himself in the ultimate ideal space, without reference to his last dialectical anchor: recognition through another person. Even in “Dejection” Coleridge retained the boon of recognition by assuming that the “other”

would appreciate the joy in the natural world, even if he couldn't. And more significantly, this other would *embody* this joy and ideality *for* the poet. In "Constancy" there is no Hartley or Sara to embody Coleridge's idealism, no "dear embodied good" and therefore no recognition in another, through the mediation of the work of art. Coleridge here, more than in "Kubla Khan" is working at the level of *ideality*, and in this experience is left with nothing but the infinite yearning postulated by Novalis; stripped of embodiment and left in the realm of pure *poesis*. Even though Sara and home "are one" and as such embodied, this is an *ideal* embodiment.

Coleridge's yearning "To have a home, an English home, and Thee" can also be read in terms of Novalis' idea that philosophy is "homesickness" as well as in the literal sense that Coleridge is emotionally homeless in his relationship with Sarah Fricker— again, an interesting displacement through which Coleridge symbolises his lack of imaginative power and joy through the allegorical vehicle of his emotional narrative—the seeking of the embodiment of an ideal. But the injunction, "Vain repetition! Home and Thou are One!" further points to the idea that Sara Hutchinson represents home for Coleridge, that she is not dislocated from "Home" but is a figure of metonymy for home in the poet. For Novalis, philosophy is an infinite striving, with no beginning or end: *the philosopher is at home in being away from home*. Philosophy is "really homesickness, *the drive to be at home everywhere*."⁶² As such, Coleridge has the feeling (*Gefühl*) of home, but in the discourse of "Constancy to an Ideal Object" he can only approximate this sense of *Gefühl* through the embodiment of his *ideal* home, recognised metonymically and symbolically in Sara Hutchinson. This ideal home is further something deferred by Coleridge—Sara and home "are One" however this *ideal symbol* is unattainable by

Coleridge, because the ideal (and symbolic) vision of his Lakeland home, his “cot” and Sara transmigrate into the woodman’s chimera (see below). For Coleridge, the experience of home is less a cosmopolitan experience of *Gefühl* as it is for Novalis, and more of a localised, embodied vision of home, however unattainable.

In the final metaphor of the woodman we encounter another representation of a schema similar to that of Novalis’—the poet or seer creates the very truth they seek through the experience of temporal division, and the truth lies within the individual’s consciousness.

“...Such thou art, as when
 “The Woodman, winding westward up the glen,
 “At wintry dawn, where o’er the sheep-track’s maze
 “The viewless snow-mist weaves a glist-ning haze,
 “Sees full before him, gliding without tread
 “An image with a glory round its head:-
 “Th’ enamour’d rustic worships it’s fair hues,
 “Nor knows he *makes* the shadow he pursues! (25-32)

Therefore, the poet has no choice but to reflect back upon himself, and to realise that the image is also a self-projection—proleptic thought going forward and catching up with itself. However, as de Man claimed in his reading of Hegelian *Erkenntnis*, the consciousness will have to traverse its *Gestalten* in order to return into itself. This is the figure best representative of Coleridge the philosopher poet, who in his own ontological quest has indeed traversed the *sybiotic alterity* of receptivity and autonomy through “Kubla Khan” to “Constancy to an Ideal Object”, only to return to himself in a new guise, and with a higher awareness that absolute autonomy is not conceivable unless glimpsed through a *mediative* encounter with the external world, through the interrogative and allegorical format of his conversational poems.

Finally, in analysing the work and philosophy of Hölderlin, Bowie makes a claim that I think corresponds to the aesthetic position Coleridge finds himself in by the time he has written “Constancy to an Ideal Object”:

The object here enables the subject to grasp what it would be like to achieve a harmonious existence, and prevents the division in self-consciousness leading merely to alienation. Because it recognises itself in the external world without surrendering itself, which it would do if it made itself dependent upon the desire to appropriate the object, the I can begin to realise how it need not repress its divided nature and can instead regard this nature as a source of ever-renewed possibility. The division, it is important to remember, came about by a free act, which moved the I beyond the imaginary stage into the complex world of self-conscious reflection. Hölderlin then, wishes to make the dividedness of self-consciousness part of its own creative potential. The I can strive to show in aesthetic production what it would be to overcome its dividedness, without regressing into an imaginary unity.⁶³

Hölderlin's aesthetic solution to the Fichtean issue of the absolute ego is one that entails receptivity to the objective world, which in turn gives the I the opportunity to exercise its "own creative potential" through a form of self-recognition and renewal on the site of the aesthetic object. The sense of *unity-in-multiple* of the aesthetic product is a projection, a proleptic action, which prevents a return to a Fichtean "imaginary unity." The dividedness we encounter perpetually in the work of Coleridge is exactly this sense of self-division between the empirical and the imaginative, which as the *symbiotic alterity of autonomy and receptivity* is dramatised in the aesthetic work. Coleridge divides himself into an allegorical and temporal figure, in the self-conscious and reflective mode of his poetry. There is no "imaginary unity" for Coleridge; the poetic dissolution of symbol into allegory ensures the self is only represented temporally. However, for Coleridge, (as opposed to Bowie's Hölderlin) this results in emotional and philosophical dejection. Coleridge therefore sketches this schema, (possibly unconsciously) upon the terrain of his poetry, and in so doing creates a dynamic dialecticism that translates into some of the finest English romantic poetry, and exposes a *punctum* of Romanticism.

Notes

1. Theosophy for Coleridge allowed space for both his theological and his philosophical terms. Whereas for Hegel, philosophy superseded religion in its significance for the emanation of *Absolute Spirit*, for Coleridge philosophy and religion had to be harmonised. In his Philosophical Lectures of 1818-19 Coleridge claimed “as religion never can be philosophy, because the only true philosophy proposes religion as its end and supplement, so on the other hand there can be no true religion without philosophy....” Kathleen Coburn (ed.) *The Philosophical Lectures of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London: The Pilot Press, 1949), p. 264.
2. Kathleen Coburn et al, (ed.) *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (New York: Routledge, 1957-1990), p. 1561.
3. Coleridge visited Germany between September 1798 and July 1799. Although he was learning the language and compiling information for a biography of Lessing, it was at this time that he first began his serious engagement with German metaphysics.
4. Kant was received by the romantics as an organic thinker, although in the third *Critique* Kant outlined organicism only as a regulatory principle.
5. Coleridge, quoted in: Marilyn Butler, *Romantics Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background 1760-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 81.
6. Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, pp. 40-41, quoted in: Meyer Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 171.
7. See Hegel’s own work on poetry where he situates poetry on a higher level than other art forms such as music, architecture and sculpture that have more sensuous particularity as a requirement for their adequation. With the romantic stage of art spirit is best (but of course imperfectly) expressed in poetry, the highest form of which is dramatic poetry, arriving after epic and lyric poetry. Hegel writes of concrete universal representation in poetry: “With this way of looking at things, poetry presents all its subject-matter as a totality complete in itself and therefore independent; this whole may be rich and may have a vast range of relations, individuals, actions, events, feelings, sorts of ideas, but poetry must display this vast complex as perfect in itself, as produced and animated by the single principle which is manifested externally in this or that individual detail. Consequently the universal and the rational are not expressed in poetry in abstract universality and *philosophically* proved interconnection, or with their aspects merely related together as in *scientific* thinking, but instead as animated, manifest, ensouled, determining the whole, and yet at the same time expressed in such a way that the all-comprising unity, the real animating soul, is made to work only in secret from within outwards.” G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Lectures on Fine Art: Volume 2*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford university press, 1975), p. 973.
8. Abrams, p. 119.
9. Coleridge, due to his theological background, is likely here to be referencing Exodus 3. 14. “God answered, ‘I AM; that is who I am. Tell them that I AM has sent you to them.’” This adds to the importance of the theological influence when reading Coleridge’s philosophical theory of the imagination, and in particular his overall reception of Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*.

10. Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche* 2nd ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 104.
11. Bowie, p. 106.
12. Tim Milnes, "Through the Looking Glass: Coleridge and Post-Kantian Philosophy", *Comparative Literature*, Fall, 1999, p. 134.
13. Coleridge, quoted in: Ayon Roy, "The Spectre of Hegel in Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, April, 2007: p. 292.
14. See Roy, pp. 290-96.
15. Hegel, quoted in Bowie, p. 146.
16. Roy, p. 293.
17. Jonathan Wordsworth, "The Infinite I AM: Coleridge and the Ascent of Being," in Richard Gravil, Lucy Newlyn and Nicholas Roe (ed.) *Coleridge's Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 41.
18. Jonathan Wordsworth, p. 44.
19. See Norman Fruman, "Coleridge's rejection of nature and the natural man," *Coleridge's Imagination*, pp. 69-78.
20. *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Volume. 2*, p. 2546.
21. There are numerous comparisons to be made between Goethe and Coleridge during this period, and Coleridge's Germany trip would also have greatly improved his exposure to Goethe. Goethe himself famously said of the distinction between allegory and symbol "Allegory transforms the phenomenon into a concept, the concept into an image, but in such a way that the concept always remains bounded in the image, and is entirely to be kept and held in it, and to be expressed by it.
 Symbolism [however] transforms the phenomenon into idea, the idea into an image, and in such a way that the idea remains always infinitely active and unapproachable in the image, and even if expressed in all languages, still would remain inexpressible." (Goethe, *Maxims and Reflections*, Nos. 1112-1113). For Goethe the symbol is more suggestive than allegory, which remains static. Coleridge values symbol over allegory because it gives us a deeper and more intuitive link to God and partakes in the Eternal (in the case for example, of the Bible). Both writers certainly claim that allegory is fixed between a set subject and object, whereas symbol is more dynamic in its representation. For a further comparison of Coleridge's and Goethe's places in the wider discourse of organicism, see Jacob Opper, *Science and the arts: a study in relationships from 1600-1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), pp. 38-43.
22. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "The Statesman's Manual" in *Biographia Literaria and Two Lay Sermons* (London: Elbrion Classics, 2004), p. 322.
23. See Milton's "Lycidas" : "the hungry sheep [congregation] look up, and are not fed,/But swoln with wind, and the rank mist they draw [moral sermon],/ Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread." (125-127).
24. "The Statesman's Manual", pp. 322, 324.
25. David Dawson, "Against the Divine Ventriloquist: Coleridge and de Man on Symbol, Allegory, and Scripture", *Journal of Literature and Theology*, Vol 4, No. 3, November 1990, pp. 296-297.
26. Dawson, p. 306.
27. See Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality", in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 187-228.

28. de Man, p. 191.
29. Cyrus Hamlin, "The Temporality of Selfhood: Metaphor and Romantic Poetry", *New Literary History*, Vol. 6, No. 1. On Metaphor, Autumn, 1974: pp. 169-193.
30. Symbolic identity is once again seen as the *aesthesis* or intellectual intuition that is central to Romanticism. However, in Schiller's terminology, romantic poets, in the process of creation, remained in a state of *sentimentality*, whereby they longed, within their temporal prison-house, for a symbolic state of unification, either aetiological or eschatological. Either way, the sense of division, ultimately of subject and object (whether ideal or immanent) remains a central driving force within the creative act itself. Hamlin claims: "According to the [romantic] ideal of art—as I have defined it from Schiller's theory—the beautiful and the sublime should become identical through symbolic fusion, whereby the temporal and infinite are united within the totality of the poem. Such a concept of symbolic form constitutes the central Romantic theory of poetry, at least in the ideal. In practice, however, the poets themselves, who always provide a more reliable measure than the theorists of what poetry actually does and can do, ultimately recognize that such a symbolic fusion cannot be achieved. Some degree of tension or discontinuity always remains between the finite means and the infinite end, the temporal structure and the transcendent goal, which poetic language and poetic experience cannot overcome. This tension or discontinuity, which could also be described in terms of *ironic* or *dialectical* structure (especially if we were to use these terms as defined by such German theorists as Friedrich Schlegel or Hegel), is what I mean by the metaphoric—as distinct from the symbolic—mode of Romantic poetry." Hamlin, p. 182.
31. See Anne K. Mellor, "On Romantic Irony, Symbolism and Allegory", *Criticism*, 21:3, 1979, Summer: pp. 217-229. For another interesting reading of de Man's mystification of allegory over symbol, see also Jean-Pierre Mileur " 'The Rhetoric of Temporality' Re-examined", *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 38, No. 4, Autumn, 1986: 329-336.
32. Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry* quoted in Mellor, p. 224.
33. Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry* quoted in Mellor, p. 224.
34. Anne K. Mellor, *English Romantic Irony* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 23.
35. Mellor, "On Romantic Irony, Symbolism and Allegory", p. 225.
36. Transcendental Buffoonery is the term Schlegel uses to describe the romantic artist's distance from his own creation—he simultaneously mocks and affirms his creation. The term is derived from the *buffo* character in Italian *commedia dell'arte* plays, "a dramatic character who both controls the plot and mocks the play." Mellor, "On Romantic Irony, Symbolism and Allegory," p. 228.
37. Mellor, *English Romantic Irony*, p. 14.
38. Mellor, *English Romantic Irony*, pp. 157-8.
39. See Exodus: 3. 7-8, "I have taken heed of their [the Israelites] sufferings, and have come down to rescue them from the power of Egypt, and to bring them out of that country into a fine, broad land; it is a land of flowing with milk and honey." However for another, Christian Humanist reading, see also the possible influence of Plato's *Ion*: "...the lyric poets are not in their right

minds when they are composing their beautiful strains: but when falling under the power of music and metre they are inspired and possessed; like Bacchic maidens who draw milk and honey from the rivers when they are under the influence of Dionysus but when they are not in their right mind. And the soul of the lyric poet does the same, as they themselves say; for they tell us that they bring songs from honeyed fountains, culling them out of the gardens and dells of the muses;..." This further brings up the possibility of transcendental inspiration, and unconscious forces that affect the poet. One must not forget this could also be a reference to the influence of opium in the poem's composition.

40. Jerome McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983), p. 101.
41. McGann's main new historicist argument (see introduction) works on the assumption that critics such as Abrams and Wellek have worked on the assumptions or self-representations of romantic poets and therefore uncritically expanded upon the discourse of romantic ideology.
42. Abrams, p. 278.
43. See John Beer's excellent essay "The Languages of Kubla Khan", in *Coleridge's Imagination*, pp. 218-262.
44. Beer, p. 235.
45. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. J. Engell & W. Jackson Bate (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 31.
46. *Biographia Literaria*, p. 32.
47. This is the final (1834) version of the poem, published in the *Poetical Works* (1834). It omits the final lines of Hartley's reaction to the icicles in the original version, as well as the lines discussed above. There are actually 7 versions of the poem in print.
48. Coleridge, "Lectures on the Slave Trade" quoted in Jonathan Wordsworth, p. 28.
49. Meyer Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971), p. 99.
50. *The Philosophical Lectures of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, p. 433 n.7.
51. McGann, p. 96.
52. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Poetical Works Volumes I and II, Poems (Variorum Text)*, ed. J.C.C. Mays (New Jersey: Princeton University, 2001), p. 570, 15fn.
53. This is the third *published* version, first collected in *Sibylline Leaves* (1817). This is also the most well known version of the poem and is further the version of course where the displacement of Sara (Asra) comes full circle.
54. Coleridge, *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, quoted. in Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (London: Flamingo, 1989), p. 302.
55. For an interesting discussion on the romantic conception of the feminine, see Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (London: Routledge, 1993). See also Marlon B. Ross "Romantic Quest and Conquest: Troping Masculine Power in the Crisis of Poetic Identity", in Ann K. Mellor (ed.) *Romanticism and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 24-50.
56. J. Robert Barth S.J., "Coleridge's *Dejection*: imagination, joy, and the power of love", in *Coleridge's Imagination*, p. 184.
57. Barth S.J., p. 185.

58. See for example, the reading given by Abrams in *The Mirror and the Lamp*, pp. 66-69.
59. G.W.F. Hegel, "Two Fragments of 1797 on Love" *Clio* 8(2), 1979: pp. 257-265.
60. Samuel Taylor Coleridge "On Poesy or Fine Art" in *English Essays: Sidney to Macauley. Vol. xxvii. The Harvard Classics* (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1909-14) <<http://bartleby.org/27/17.htm>
61. My use of the term *punctum* is taken from Roland Barthe's original use of the term in his excellent book *Camera Lucida* in which he uses the two terms *studium* and *punctum* to describe our experience of photographs. Whilst the former is an experience based upon culture, education, semiotics, values e.t.c, the second is based upon the much more personal "prick" of something metonymical in the image, that strikes the viewer deeply, but not from an intention of the photographer, or in this case, the poet. In describing his experience of the *punctum* of a photograph by Kertész, Barthes writes "Hence, the detail which interests me is not, or at least is not strictly, intentional, and probably must not be so; it occurs in the field of the photographed thing like a supplement which is at once inevitable and delightful; it does not necessarily attest to the photographer's art; it says only that the photographer was there, or else, still more simply, that he could not *not* photograph the partial object at the same time as the total object (how could Kertész have "separated" the dirt road from the violinist walking on it?) The photographer's "second sight" does not consist in "seeing" but in being there. And above all, imitating Orpheus, he must not turn back to what he is leading—what he is giving to me!" Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), p. 47. Parts of the poems under discussion here, on my reading, produce a "prick" which is something brought out in Barthe's sense metonymically or as a supplement in the poem.
The term has also been used by Hal Foster, in his work on de-sublimatory and sublimatory surrealism, *Compulsive Beauty*. Foster argues that the dialectical movement between desire and death produces an experience of the *uncanny*, which is a *punctum* of surrealism. Foster writes "At some moments Breton and company work to *separate* desire and death, to oppose the first to the second—only to find in times of desire the presence of death. At other moments they work to *reconcile* desire and death (as in the two "Manifesto" definitions of surreality), to qualify the second with the first—only to sense that this point of reconciliation is the very *punctum* of the uncanny, i.e. the point where desire and death interpenetrate in a way that brooks no affirmative reconciliation." Hal Foster, *Compulsive Beauty* (Massachusetts: M.I.T Press, 1993), p. 17. In the same way there is a *punctum* in certain romantic encounters in which the attempted fusion of autonomous imagination with the world produces a puncture, and this does not necessarily consist in the artist's "seeing" or "composing" but in "being there."
62. Novalis, quoted in Bowie, p. 96.
63. Bowie, p. 87.

Chapter Three

Wordsworth's Metaphysical Equipoise

1. Introduction

In this chapter I discuss Wordsworth's early poetry written between the years 1798-1805. This period corresponds to Coleridge's early work discussed in the last chapter, and also with the early stages of the composition of Wordsworth's planned philosophical epic, *The Recluse*. I want to argue that during this period of creativity he attains a *metaphysical equipoise*¹, that is to say, he attains a deep balance between the outer world and the inner mind. This equipoise consistently eluded Coleridge in his own poetry. The main reason for Wordsworth's success is his poetic organicism, the view that there is a deep connection between the imaginative powers of the poet and the *natura naturans* experienced when the poet communes with the natural world. Whilst there is a clear connection with Coleridge's theoretical dualism of the mechanical and the organic,² for Coleridge this theory is mainly placed in the service of his literary criticism rather than in actual poetic creation. By contrast, Wordsworth seeks to attain a union between mind and the natural world through careful deployment of stylistic devices within his poetry. In this way, Wordsworth's organicism comes very close to the German *Naturphilosophie* explored by Coleridge.

I develop my argument by focusing on two features of Wordsworth's poetry: first, his use of embodiment of the visionary mind, primarily within a romanticised landscape as perceived by the poet but also within other human subjects; and secondly through his own *unifying* use of symbol and allegory. From the neo-Hegelian interpretive perspective I have employed so far in which the aesthetic ideal translates as a struggle for *aesthetic recognition*, these stylistic devices and images

can be seen as deepening the poet's metaphysical connection to the universe, allowing him to perform within the poetic idiom itself a kind of recognition of himself in the external universe, and so attain *metaphysical equipoise*. The telling difference between the two poets is that whereas in Coleridge's poetry, the experience of the relationship between the mind and nature is represented as self-consciously fragmentary, for Wordsworth this experience is presented in a unifying narrative; a narrative grounded in his own particular notion of organicism.

The first section of the present chapter is an analysis of Wordsworth's own treatment of romantic metaphysics, which develops into his organicism and metaphysical equipoise. In section two of the chapter I examine examples of his poetry to assess not only how these poems express the dialectic of the romantic imagination and the natural world, but also how through the operation of this dialectic Wordsworth achieves reconciliation between inner and outer. In the third section I discuss how previous critical reception of Wordsworth such as that of Hartman and Bloom has often become entrenched within unresolved poststructuralist dialectics and therefore misses the deeper value of a philosophical-organicist reading of his poetry. In the following three sections I assess in detail aspects of his poetry that support the organicist reading, examining Wordsworth's troping of embodiment within the landscape. I finish with a structuralist analysis of his use of symbol and allegory in 'reading' the semiotics of the landscape. In so doing I argue that he unifies symbol and allegory in order to concretise his philosophical organicism.

2. Wordsworth and romantic metaphysics

Wordsworth's actual knowledge of German metaphysics was limited at best. As he once told Henry Crabb-Robinson he was happy "Having never read a word of German metaphysics, thank heaven!"³ However, Coleridge saw Wordsworth as fit to

write the philosophical epic, the never completed *Recluse*. I would like to propose the argument that Wordsworth was a philosophical poet in his own right, without recourse to German or Coleridgean metaphysics. Simon Jarvis has recently questioned the actual influence of Coleridge's own burgeoning system in Wordsworth's poetry, arguing instead for the self-legislating philosophical nature of Wordsworth's actual poetry itself:

The question at issue is whether, as Bromwich suggests, the philosophical aspiration in Wordsworth's writing are adventitious, superimposed upon a steady look at the subject which already contains all that is of vital interest; or whether that steady look at the subject itself developed as it did partly because of, rather than in spite of, Wordsworth's aspiration to become a philosophical poet⁴

Wordsworth actually turns out under scrutiny to attain metaphysical equipoise whereas Coleridge retains an aporetic dualism and this is because Coleridge failed to incorporate his organicist literary principle into his poetry at a philosophical level. I contend he applied the principle at a literary-critical level, whereas Wordsworth actually did not.

To begin with, Coleridge expounded on the imagination that "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate" and this is exemplified in his reconciliation of "discordant" elements in fragmentary, imaginative works such as "Kubla Khan." So stylistically, Coleridge at times reflected his own idea of the romantic imagination in his work. However, his divided and unhappy consciousness was aporetic because he failed to *fully* capture the primary imagination, or 'Infinite I AM' within his work.

With regards theory, Coleridge's overall poetics are organic, to the point where the whole structure of the poem *grows* in an organic fashion, and therefore *all of its parts* including meter and rhyme grow and function only as part of the whole—one cannot in essence mechanically separate the constituent parts—or the form and content of the poem. Wordsworth on the other hand, formulates his poetic theory

along lines, which though critical of neoclassic diction, incorporate some of the universal concepts of rationalist enlightenment thinking inherent in neoclassicism. For example, his theory of composition is classicist in that it is well informed by Longinian primitivism. The following extract from the preface to the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads* illustrates this point:

The principal object, then, which I proposed to myself in these poems, was to choose incidents and situations from the common life, and to relate or describe them throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men, and at the same time to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way. And further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them (truly, though not ostentatiously) the primary laws of our nature, chiefly as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement.⁵

The idea of language “really used by men” is Longinian, in its primitivist bent towards a more natural sounding language, a more pure sounding cadence and prosody, akin to the way people speak in natural situations or environments. Moreover, Wordsworth’s ideas on “common life” and “the primary laws of our nature” sound distinctly classicist and incorporate the Enlightenment appetite for universal laws, or *the Golden Mean*. In addition, the ideas discussed in this passage are far from the organicism of Coleridge. For Wordsworth, the idea of spontaneity is countered by metrical considerations—and yet this consideration of form and content is itself highly stylised and mechanical. The line “associate ideas in a state of excitement” further points to a more mechanical, and associationist criticism, rather than organic. Marilyn Butler stresses the inherent enlightenment principles and neoclassic foundations of *The Lyrical Ballads*:

Wordsworth’s experiments with subjects from among the lower orders of society, in metres appropriately taken from popular society, follow thirty years of public interest in this matter and this manner, and are thus characteristic of the culture of the Enlightenment. [...] Wordsworth carries over into the new major phase of his writing the

characteristics of Neoclassicism—simplicity, gravity, humanity and public spirit—which in his hands are at first fortified, not undermined, by the counter-revolution’s taste for hearth and home.⁶

In Butler’s eyes therefore, Wordsworth is working with Enlightenment principles in mind, best exemplified in neoclassic *content*—although in Wordsworth’s case not *form*. In this sense therefore, Coleridge’s poetic *theory* is more organic and closer to Hegelian ideology, whereas Wordsworth’s is closer to the rationalist French ideology of Destutt de Tracy;⁷ however, Wordsworth produces a more unified vision in his poetry.

In discussing the ideas of the *Frühromantiker*, Beiser claims that there is a dichotomy in the post-Kantian philosophical world between Fichtean subjectivity and Spinozist monism, both ideas that attracted the Jena romantics. He argues that by combining Leibnizian entelechy with Spinozean monism the romantics opened up a teleological monism that would posit the human mind as the self-conscious subject and *telos* of this organic universe. He claims:

Like all parts of an organic whole, the subject and object are internally related to one another in this manner [part to whole]. The subject’s awareness of an object develops and realizes the powers of the object, so that its awareness of the object is nothing less than the *self*-realization of the object. Since artistic creativity and philosophical contemplation is the highest organization and development of all the powers of nature, the artist’s and the philosopher’s awareness of nature is nothing less than the *self*-awareness of nature through the artist and the philosopher.⁸

The romantic organicism outlined by Beiser here differs from Hegel’s organicism in that Hegel would place the philosopher, who uses reason, higher than the poet on this ladder of self-realisation. However, when we read Wordsworth as the philosopher-poet aiming at the utterance of universal truths through *poesy*, we see that Wordsworthian organicism more readily fits Beiser’s definition. Wordsworth’s “awareness of nature is nothing less than the *self*-awareness of nature” through his

own fully-matured mind; and this is the root of his organicism as a poet. To attain this state of awareness, Wordsworth embarks upon a dialectical encounter with the natural world in poems such as “Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey” and *The Prelude*, and the *telos* of the organicist progression is the realisation of the poet as the Gnostic spirit-head of nature. This is of course a realisation that only comes about by way of the poet’s own fully-developed self-consciousness; for example on Snowdon in book thirteen of *The Prelude* when Wordsworth claims:

...Nature thus
 Thrusts forth upon the senses, is the express
 Resemblance, in the fullness of its strength
 Made visible, a genuine Counterpart
 And Brother of the glorious faculty
 Which higher minds bear with them as their own;
 This is the very spirit in which they deal
 With all the objects of the universe. (1805-06, 13, 85-92)

The familial metaphor of nature and the “glorious faculty” of the imagination is key here to Wordsworth’s organicism; the imagery of the imagination “Made visible” in nature further adds to the emphasis on the deep organic connection between the mind and the natural world. This is due to the visualisation of the mind in the natural world and the natural world reciprocally representing the imagination as its “genuine counterpart.” Thus the poet seeks recognition of his own being and finds this recognition in the organic synthesis of the mind and the natural world. Wordsworth also alludes to the fact that “higher minds” bear imagination with them as “their own” and that they deal with “all the objects of the universe” in this manner. This further illustrates the concept that the poet or philosopher can only come to this conclusion when they have reached a higher psychological or spiritual state—a state whereby their mind is able to recognise its connection with the external universe. Wordsworth hereby illustrates his ideal of a teleological link between the universe and the *active* imaginative mind. This is the organic *aesthesis* of a *totum* that arises

from the subject's creative imagination, which failed Coleridge due to his entrapment within an unresolved philosophical dialectic between the inner and the outer worlds of experience.

As I claimed in the last chapter, Coleridge could not reconcile his own philosophical need for an intellectual intuition within the *noumenal* sphere, (a space of autonomy), with the idea of empirical experience as being essential to the construction of any philosophical foundationalism. Wordsworth however has no problem at working this issue out within the space of his organic poetics. The reason for this is that Wordsworth treats the apparent alterity of the external world in a *more* Hegelian sense than does Coleridge. If we recall, Hegel criticised Schelling for his failure to adopt a system of what amounts to a *concrete universal* when he claimed of Schelling's system "the identity between subject and object is set up absolutely, without it being proven that this is the truth." Hegel comes to his absolute Spirit through the *interiorisation* of experience and any abstraction outside of actual experience is doomed to failure. For Hegel, aesthetics, religion and ultimately philosophy are the three modes of *concrete universal* that exhibit varying degrees of awareness of an absolute that precedes them. However, this crucially depends upon the subject's own psychological reception of datum; Coleridge in his poetic enterprise remains in a state of the *abstract universal* for two main reasons. Firstly, his philosophical need for an intellectual intuition places him in a state of near enmity with the external universe. Although his unifying organicism works at the level of criticism, it cannot accommodate his *overall* philosophical requirements. This is the reason for his crises in being unable to transcend the external world in works such as "Dejection" and "Constancy." His abstractions, and his failure to deduce an aesthetic experience of the infinite, are due to his failure to grasp the

concrete whole—this is in fact his failure to *interiorise* the external world. The closest he comes to this, as I have already discussed, is through the mediate projection either onto another in the future (Hartley) or synchronically onto an existential other (Sara Hutchinson). These encounters are examined in abstractions from outside an actual concrete appreciation of the infinite and are in fact displaced failures on the part of Coleridge to interiorise his experience of nature.

Secondly, his organic enterprise fails to resolve the tension between a need to discover an unconditioned condition (again outside of empirical experience) and to unite the subjective with an external other. The need for an unconditioned experience obviously goes against the grain of the concrete universal; and the “identity” philosophy required for the unification of the subject and external other is something that can further only be gained through experience and internalization of the external world, transforming it into the state of the *concrete universal*. These combined failures on the part of Coleridge lead to a state of the divided and unhappy consciousness, which is something that Wordsworth managed to transcend through his dialectical synthesis or *progress through contradiction*—through the organic synthesis of the *external* and the *imaginative* world.

Wordsworth indirectly addresses his implicit rejection of an intellectual intuition in book two of the *Prelude* (1805-06). He wrote this section of the poem as an attack on scientism, and perhaps as a reflection of his changing views towards Hartleyan associationism.⁹ By extension, we can trace the argument to a further rejection of an intellectual intuition; Wordsworth uses the metaphor of a flowing river to illustrate his point:

Who knows the individual hour in which
His habits were first sown, even as a seed,
Who that shall point, as with a wand, and say,
‘This portion of the river of my mind

Came from yon fountain"?... (1805-06, 2, 211-215)

The repudiation of the speculative source of cognition using the organic imagery of “seed” can be read as antithetical to Coleridge’s own epistemological organicism: Wordsworth employs the organicist trope but refuses the philosophical implications of Coleridge’s particular organicist vision. This is because the Coleridgean organic vision is self-contradictory in that it uses an organic analogy for criticism, cosmology and epistemology—however it still requires an intuition, or seed, which stands *independently* of the empirical world. In the lines following this repudiation of scientism— and by extension philosophical foundationalism— Wordsworth addresses Coleridge directly and explicitly embraces his theory of *organic unity*:

....Thou art no slave
Of that false secondary power, by which,
In weakness, we create distinctions, then
Deem that our puny boundaries are things
Which we perceive, and not which we have made.
To thee, unblinded by these outward shows
The unity of all has been reveal’d
And thou wilt doubt with me, less aptly skill’d
Than many are to class the cabinet
Of their sensations,...

.....
Hard task to analyse a soul, in which,
Not only general habits and desires,
But each most obvious and particular thought,
Not in a mystical and idle sense,
But in words of reason deeply weigh’d,
Hath no beginning. (1805-06, 2, 220-229, 232-237)

In unpacking this section of poetry we find a number of references to Coleridge’s growing philosophical concerns. Firstly, he refers to the mechanical fancy as “that false secondary power” and the “puny boundaries” that are created by the mind, (akin to the transcendental categories of Kant). However, in Wordsworth’s eyes, Coleridge has already gone beyond these transcendental categories to the “unity of all.” This is a positive reference to Coleridge’s *purported* organicism, in the form of

his romantic primary imagination—the unity of which appears to lie beyond the dualistic ontology of Kantianism. This is however, as I claimed above, an organicism that only actually functions for Coleridge at the modality of *criticism*—and fails him philosophically. Consequently, in Wordsworth’s poetic treatment a contradiction emerges, in that Wordsworth on the one hand discerns an acknowledgment of an holistic world conception in his friend, however on the other it appears Wordsworth cannot discern the possibility of what amounts to any solid foundationalism on which to base a philosophical system. In this section of his poem, Wordsworth has—through his tribute to Coleridge—countenanced the logical gap and the eventual philosophical aporia that will haunt Coleridge throughout his career. This further feeds into lines 232-236, because Wordsworth realises, (as does Schelling, and later Coleridge) that a foundational intellectual intuition in “words of reason deeply weighed,/ Hath no beginning.” Whilst Wordsworth’s explicit targets in this section are associationism and scientism, at the same time his analysis aptly summarises the aporetic nature of Coleridge’s own quest for metaphysical certainty. Jonathan Wordsworth claims that Wordsworth is forced into this by his own desire for what he *perceives* as Coleridge’s philosophical unity:

By the time of the two-part *Prelude* Wordsworth has been thrown back on the Intuition, is envious of Coleridge to whom “the unity of all” has been positively *revealed*, and is himself to be seen looking for a new and different means of reconciling the apparent disparateness of experience. Both the structure of his poem, and the structure of his thought, seem to require a supernatural frame of reference.¹⁰

Whilst I don’t agree that Wordsworth was “envious” of Coleridge’s philosophical position, he is troubled by the need for an intellectual intuition as a metaphysical basis for his own burgeoning philosophical project. However, his organicism will

actually take the same path as that of Hegel; he will interiorise the externality of the universe and in so doing remove the problem of an intellectual intuition. In analysing Coleridge's supposed unity, Wordsworth discovers his own form of organicism whilst unintentionally exposing his friend's lack of philosophical substance. The metaphor of the "river of my mind" aptly points the way towards the Wordsworthian conception of organicism—one that is fluid, transparent and (as water) part of the body and the physical universe, whilst as mind it equally permeates the outer and the inner—and no one knows its *original source*. In a final paradoxical twist, his reference to "a mystical and idle sense" as an alternative to the route of reason is the route which Wordsworth the romantic poet chooses—his is of a more *mystical* sense of organicism than that of Coleridge and is "idle" in the sense that reason actually detracts from this *passive* organicism; in this sense "idle" is paradoxically taken to mean a lighter, more passive organicism. Wordsworth makes the leap to romantic metaphysics, but not through actively "weighed" reason or through reading Kant, Spinoza or Hegel; he achieves metaphysical equipoise through the balance of the inner and outer in his own passive, organic aesthetic.

Wordsworth traces his theory of self-knowledge to the organic connection with the natural world, a connection first realised through filial bonds, and comments upon this in the next section of the poem: "Bless'd the infant babe,/ (For with my best conjectures I would trace/ The progress of our being)..." (1805-06, 238-239). He goes on to refer to the blessed "infant babe" who "when his soul/ Claims manifest kindred with an earthly soul,/ Doth gather passion from his mother's eye!" (1805-06, 241-43). There is a mutual recognition implied in that the baby gathers passion and understanding through recognition in the mother's eye. However, this maternal 'summons' is extended into the realm of the larger natural world, and

develops into a *natural summons* that extends infinitely and becomes the Wordsworthian form of an organic basis for his poetic philosophy—a unification of the inner and outer that only commences with a recognition in the eyes of the mother. The further advance of this unifying spirit is elaborated in the following lines:

Such feelings pass into his torpid life
Like an awakening breeze, and hence his mind
Even []
Is prompt and watchful, eager to combine
In one appearance, all the elements
And parts of the same object, else detach'd
And loth to coalesce...

Along his infant veins are interfus'd
The gravitation and the filial bond
Of nature, that connect him with the world. (1805-06, 2, 244-250, 262-264)

The mutuality first discerned within the recognition between mother and child transforms into the maternal connection of *Mother Nature* and the developing mind of the receptive child, and eventually the whole of nature and the *mature* poet. Therefore, as in Hegel's theory of recognition, there is a presupposed receptivity to the external world that provides the subject with its autonomy. The organic "filial bond" established between mother and child opens a receptivity and summons to the organic world at large, hence "Such feelings pass into his torpid life/ Like an awakening breeze." The filial bond become further the "bond of nature, that connect him with the world." In Wordsworthian metaphysics, this is the birthplace of the poetic imagination, which culminates in a state of mutuality with the external universe through which as an agent it "Creates, creator and receiver both,/ Working but in alliance with the works/ Which it beholds..." (273-75). Through a receptivity that is opened through the process of recognition between mother and child, to an extended receptivity to nature of the human subject as it develops. Wordsworth

creates a relational autonomy-through-receptivity similar to that Hegel lays down in his theory of recognition. The subject eventually internalises the natural world through a process of cognitive recognition and becomes both an imaginative “creator” and also the “receiver” of nature’s inward entelechy. Or in Beiser’s words:

If the self is the highest organization and development of all the powers of nature, then nature ceases to be some external power outside the self, an external cause that compels him into action. Rather, nature becomes part of the self because its intrinsic ends are achieved only through it. If the self is the highest expression of nature, then nature contracts to the limits of the self as the self expands to the whole of nature.¹¹

The self, as the “highest expression of nature”, which in Wordsworth’s case is the poetic imagination, reflects the inner processes of nature and recognises itself as part of nature, in an equipoise gained through a dialectical relationship to nature that I shall discuss in the next section.

3. Wordsworth’s ladder

A.C. Bradley famously helped shift Wordsworthian criticism into the twentieth century when he examined the tensions in Wordsworth’s poetry, and opposed them to what he saw as the limitations of Arnold’s humanist reading of Wordsworth.¹² Bradley famously summed up these tensions between the empirical and the imaginative thus:

Everything here is natural, but everything is apocalyptic. And we happen to know why. Wordsworth is describing the scene in light of memory. [...] The visionary feeling has here a peculiar tone; but always openly or covertly, it is the intimation of something illimitable, over-arching or reaching into the customary reality.¹³

Bradley points the way to the dialectical nature of experience in Wordsworth, dialectical because on the one hand it describes a past scene from a new temporal perspective, and is therefore interrogating the past from a present perspective, whilst also combining an empirical experience of the natural world with a transcendental, or apocalyptic imaginative experience. This dual nature of experience has been

explored in Wordsworthian criticism, but the question remains as to how Wordsworth forges ahead through this dialectical experience to the sense of *metaphysical equipoise* that I outlined in the previous section. We can answer this by examining the dialectical nature of the Wordsworthian experience, before going on to examine the structural devices Wordsworth employs in order to unify this experience.

Abrams claims that the poetic vision as explored in *The Prelude* is a modern allegory of Christian theodicy, of the fall of man and a regaining of unity, or the marriage of the lamb and the New Jerusalem. On this reading the romantic endeavour is one of a secularised Christian narrative, allegorised into a modern fall of man, and the dialectical movement is one spiralling out towards a greater unity.¹⁴ Abrams goes on to cite the philosophy of Hegel as further allegorising Christian eschatology, and placing the mind in the space of the Christian soul or deity:

This retention of traditional Christian concepts and the traditional Christian plot but demythologised, conceptualised, and with all-controlling providence converted into a “logic” or dialectic that controls all the interactions of subject and object, gives its distinctive character and design to what we call “Romantic philosophy.” In this grandiose enterprise, however, it is the subject, mind, or spirit which is primary and takes over the initiative and the functions which had once been the prerogatives of deity.¹⁵

Abrams argues that Wordsworth and Hegel share the dialectical ladder in their respective searches for a romantic unity, a ladder that symbolises the secularisation of traditional Christian motifs. Critics such as Mellor have bemoaned the lack of treatment of romantic irony in Abrams’ work, which was due to the fact that Abrams was only treating the aspects of Romanticism that dealt with the essential unity that stems from the transformation of the traditional Judaeo-Christian motif.¹⁶ However, an understanding that Wordsworth’s essential *concrete universal conceptualisation of nature*, read in relation to Coleridge’s failure to internalise nature, helps to

illustrate how *both* Wordsworthian holistic teleology *and* the irony of Coleridge can be read using the rubric of the same dialectical struggle or “climb”.

Wordsworth himself, in *The Prelude*, deals with the central contradictions that underlie his poetry, and are worked out in a *Bildungsroman*, whereby the poet gains a firm sense of the archaeology of his creative romantic imagination. The autobiographical dialectic between the poet’s imagination and the externality of the natural world supply the driving force of this poem. Herbert Lindenberger comments:

One must remember, of course, that *The Prelude*, unlike the *Timaeus* or a theological work, is not a body of metaphysics which contents itself with setting down a clear and self-consistent image of reality. Indeed, the very qualities that give it individuality as a poem—the struggle toward definition, the constant intensification of language, the recurring spots of time—these are above all a record of a *search and struggle* toward goals which remain ultimately dim and which are in certain respects contradictory with one another.¹⁷ (*my italics*).

Lindenberger correctly states that the poem is not a body of metaphysics, although it is Wordsworth’s first part of his philosophic epic *The Recluse*, which was never completed. The dialectical “struggle” toward definition is indeed the defining character of the poem, and this struggle is apparent in the first part of the two-book (1799) *Prelude* where there is a tension clearly generated between on the one hand Wordsworth’s burgeoning pantheism and his associationist tendencies on the other, which act as intermediate layers for Wordsworth’s sense of receptivity and imaginative autonomy. Coleridge himself had shown concern that Wordsworth’s thought still retained elements of Hartleyan associationism when his own thought had self-consciously gravitated towards organicism. George McClean-Harper claims:

Coleridge never faltered in his conviction that spirit was independent of matter. His unhappy experience deepened his faith in the existence of God, and of his own soul as something detachable from his body.

[...] Yet he had once been a disciple of David Hartley and had, it seems, made a convert of Wordsworth, whose persistence in a semi-materialistic philosophy now alarmed him.¹⁸

This residual attachment to Hartley is indeed one of the reasons for the strong materialist connection between the mind and nature retained by Wordsworth; however, as I pointed out when analysing his treatment of scientism, Wordsworth could not fully subscribe to a purely associationist view of the universe.

At the commencement of the poem Wordsworth rhetorically questions the origins of his great poem, and again uses the image of a river to illuminate the connection between his mind and nature:

Was it for this
That one, the fairest of all rivers, loved
To blend his murmurs with my Nurse's song,
And from his alder shades, and rocky falls,
And from his fords and shallows, sent a voice
That flowed along my dreams?... (1798-99, 1, 1-6)

Wordsworth recognises the interconnectedness between the poetic mind and nature, through the image of his “dreams” and the recurrent image of the river running through nature and mind. The image of “my Nurse” can be read both metaphorically as nature tending the young poet’s mind, and literally as the poet’s actual nurse—either reading entails the poet’s interaction with the external world in the form of inanimate nature or in the figure of human reciprocation. We also get a sense of empirical interaction in that the poet either manages to “blend” the external sounds of the natural world with the human sound of his nurse’s song *or* the poet personifies both the inanimate river and the larger natural world, thereby setting the groundwork for a recognition akin to Novalis’ *I-thou* interactive relationship. This is important in that it sets the tone for the rubric of Wordsworth’s struggle—throughout the course of his narrative the poet will constantly interrogate the bounds between the inner and the outer, the mental and physical. The poet further

strengthens the motif of a connection between his mind and nature-as-teacher as the poem progresses through the different seasons and correspondingly focuses on an enhancement of sensations:

And afterwards, 'twas in a later day
 Though early, when upon the mountain-slope
 The frost and breath of frosty wind had snapped
 The last autumnal crocus [...]
 When scudding on from snare to snare I plied
 My anxious visitation, hurrying on,
 Still hurrying hurrying onward, how my heart
 Panted; among the scattered yew trees, and the crags
 That looked upon me, how my bosom beat
 With expectation... (1798-99, 1, 27-30, 37-42)

The poet describes the sensations of a youth experiencing the natural world at its most sensationalist, and with an untrained or immature mind. Here Wordsworth is “anxious” “hurrying onward” his “heart panted” with “expectations,” because he is a mere *receiver* of nature’s gifts, and passively subject to sensations. This sensationalist tone is further examined in “Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey” (1798) in lines such as “Flying from something that he dreads, than one/ Who sought the thing he loved. For nature then/ (The coarser pleasures of my boyish days,/ and their glad animal movements all gone by)/ To me was all in all” (72-75). The natural sensations the poet then experienced “had no need of a remoter charm,/ By thought supplied, or any interest/ Unborrowed from the eye.—That time is past,” (82-84). Wordsworth recognises that in his younger days nature was something that he only partially understood, or at least something that was important for its own sake, without further imaginative aid “By thought supplied”. The fully mature poet now brings imagination to the scene, through the medium of his memory, and therefore uses “a remoter charm” in order to more fully appreciate the poignancy of nature. In fact Wordsworth refers to his younger days with the phrase “glad animal movements” which again suggests a subject who is not yet at the higher and more

spiritual stage of development. Even at this early stage in his poetic career, Wordsworth is outlining a formative development in the relationship between his romantic imagination and the external world.

As the poem “Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey” develops we find that the imagination is moreover “In nature and the language of the sense,/ The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse/ The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul” (108-111). The prepositional phrase “in nature and the language of the sense” indicates the sense of embodiment of the imagination in the external world. He also uses appositions for nature such as “anchor,” “nurse,” “the guide” and “guardian.” All of these give us the sense of nature as in control of human agency, or at least something anterior to our agency. The use once again of “nurse” points to the idea of the mind as infant requiring edification through a self-determining receptivity to the natural world; self-determining because through our interaction with the natural world we discover our true organic self and therefore determine our sense of self.

At the end of Book One of *The Prelude* (1798-99) Wordsworth returns to a grounding associationism, especially between lines 410-440. For example he speaks of “fits of vulgar joy” (413) referring again to the sensationalist pleasures of his younger days, and after detailed analytic exposition of these experiences he speaks in plainly associationist terms:

-And if the vulgar joy by its own weight
Wearied itself out of the memory,
The scenes which were a witness of that joy
Remained, in their substantial lineaments
Depicted on the brain, and to the eye
Were visible, a daily sight: [...]
.....
[These scenes] did at length
Become habitually dear, and all
Their hues and forms were by invisible links
Allied to the affections. (1798-99, 1, 427-432, 439-442)

The materialistic imagery not only points to an associationist psychology, but also to an associationist explanation for Wordsworth's burgeoning sense of imaginative development through memory and recollection in *spots of time*. However, the "invisible links" that ally them to the affections produce a further, organic twist. Although he uses biological discursive words such as "lineaments," "brain" and "eye", Wordsworth creates tension by using the words "hues" "forms" and "invisible links" indicating a more organic and idealist discursive connection between elements. Thus, the reader is suspended between two discursive poles—one more materialistic and one more idealist and organic. The "invisible links" point to the idea that Wordsworth is absorbing nature as a part of the absolute, and in so doing forging his organic connection to the universe at large, a connection previously made in only "vulgar joy" and through sensationalism.

Even at the climactic scene on Snowdon in *The Prelude* (1805-06), Wordsworth exclaims '...but in that breach/ Through which the homeless voice of waters rose,/ That dark deep thoroughfare had *Nature lodg'd*/ The soul, the imagination of the whole.' (13, 62-65) (*My italics*). The spirit that has sought imaginative autonomy has in fact become embodied within the landscape, and this during the most celebrated moments of visionary experience. It appears that every time there is an intimation of pure imaginative autonomy, the physicality of nature embodies this experience and also provides nourishment for this experience. There are repetitive instances of the growing relationship between the imagination and the external universe in lines such as at the conclusion of the 1798-99 *Prelude*:

...A plastic power
Abode with me, a forming hand, at times
Rebellious, acting in a devious mood,
A local spirit of its own, at war
With general tendency, but for the most
Subservient strictly to the external things

With which it communed. An auxiliar light
 Came from my mind, which on the setting sun
 Bestowed new splendour; (1798-99, 2, 411-419)

Here the imagination is formed in dialectical opposition to the external world of nature, a *plastic* power as in the Coleridgean definition of the imaginative faculty in the *Biographia*. This power is “at times rebellious” and contains its own spirit—but with the important proviso that it was mostly “subservient” to the “external things with which it communed,” this phrase indicating a strong connection between the external world and the imagination. There is further the sense of a Hegelian master-slave type relationship—as if there is a struggle between the two aspects of the dialectic for mastery—the imagination is both “Rebellious” and at times “Subservient” to the external world. At this stage Wordsworth wishes to trope the relationship between the mind and nature like that of a filial relationship, in that there have been fractious and rebellious moments, but overall the relationship is incredibly close. Furthermore, in a Hegelian aesthetic sense, the mind (*Spirit*) brings something new to the overall picture by raising the empirical data to the level of consciousness and therefore “bestows new splendour.” As the sun gives out light and energy, so the mind gives out light and energy to the “setting sun.” (The figure of light would be symbolised by the moon in Wordsworth’s later *Prelude(s)*). Wordsworth is illuminating a balanced reciprocity between the mind and nature and in so doing pointing to a state of *metaphysical equipoise*, which has at this stage been self-consciously realised by the poet in his *Bildungsroman*.

4. Dialectical Criticism of Wordsworth

Geoffrey Hartman distinguishes between the supposed independence of the imagination and the equally apparent interdependence between the imagination and

nature. Hartman terms the two opposites “akedah” and “apocalypse.” The apocalyptic and autonomous imagination is supposed to be the redeemer of poetic genius in modernity, through the aforementioned secularisation of the biblical (and later Miltonic) myth. Hartman also believes that in the crisis autobiography of Wordsworth it is the constant encroachment of “akedah” (the receptive link between the mind and nature), which prevents complete autonomy of the imagination. In his own criticism Hartman initially privileges the autonomous imagination, he claims:

The poet is isolated and immobilized by it [the imagination]; it obscures rather than reveals nature; the light of the senses goes out. Only in its secondary action does it vitalize and animate, and even then not nature but a soul that realizes its individual greatness, a greatness independent of sense and circumstance. A tertiary effect does finally reach nature, when soul assured of inner or independent sources goes out and from itself.¹⁹

Hartman’s Hegelian reading of the dialectic clearly privileges the side of the apocalyptic imagination, in that it reproduces the external in its own light, as claimed by Hegel in the *Aesthetics* and echoed by Houlgate (see Chapter One). However, in Wordsworthian criticism, as in Wordsworthian poetics, it is an error to privilege one side of the opposition. As I outlined above, nature as the “anchor” and “nurse” will tie the faculty of the imagination to its roots—and Hartman subsequently acknowledges this unavoidable receptivity:

The intent of *The Prelude*, to review the sources of the poet’s faith in himself, is often diverted. The poem reviews instead the sources of the poet’s faith in nature, even though the latter is at most “something at the base” of his strength as a poet. The confusion cannot be helped. For Wordsworth’s childhood experiences work in two conflicting ways, they (1) prophesy the independence from nature of his imaginative powers, *and* (2) impress nature ineradicably on them.²⁰

Wordsworth cannot help confusing his faith in selfhood with faith in nature in his biographical exegesis, because his developing sense of selfhood is in fact reliant upon his interaction with nature. Crucially however, Hartman misses the point that

the full development of the self is reliant upon the *interiorisation* of nature-as-concept. The weakness in Hartman's reading lies in the constant repetition of a dialectical switch between imagination and nature. Hartman initially privileges the autonomy of the imagination before conceding the necessary connection between the imagination and experiences of nature. This vacillation is the underlining framework that punctuates Hartman's criticism. Wordsworth remains necessarily bound to nature for his sense of poetic self; his "self" in actual fact does have an organic relationship with nature, a relationship which, at least for Wordsworth, transcends alterity. This is an issue that Hartman doesn't fully engage with in his reading; the importance of this omission is that the actual *organic* nature of Wordsworth's poetry is never recognised by the critic who reads the poems in terms of a poststructuralist search for a never realised transcendental signified. Hartman's *apparent* Hegelianism therefore transforms into a more Kantian style of dualism.

Other critics have also remained entrenched within a style of criticism that whilst dialectical, often shows no progress through contradictory forces. Harold Bloom claims of Wordsworth's poetic enterprise:

In the covenant between Wordsworth and nature, two powers that are totally separate from each other, and potentially destructive of the other, try to meet in a dialectic of love. "Meet" is too hopeful, and "blend" would express Wordsworth's ideal and not his achievement, but the try itself is definitive of Wordsworth's strangeness and continued relevance as a poet.²¹

This view of Wordsworth's enterprise also misses the organicism in Wordsworth's thinking, and the application of this in his poetry. Bloom remains himself entrenched within his own psychoanalytical reading of Wordsworth's work, whereby he sees the work as an internalised struggle of quest romance, internalised in the sense that the ego is attempting to externalise itself in nature, but always comes back to itself, intact but without the desired result. Yet Bloom misses the full implications of a

complete Hegelian reading of the process. The ego comes back to itself and in interiorising the external world, returns to itself in a *more developed* form. Bloom's criticism remains a form of *infinite absolute negativity*, without a full realisation of the *concept* as recognised by Wordsworth the more mature poet, after he has climbed his aesthetic ladder and recognised himself as part of and therefore within the natural world. If one posits a neo-Freudian response to the poetry one is however in a position where the ego always remains divided, both from the natural world and itself.

Building on Bloom's incomplete treatment of the Wordsworthian dialectic, Marlon B. Ross has combined the idea of an internalised quest romance and Bloom's idea of the *anxiety of influence*²² and produced a feminist reading of Wordsworth's dialectic. Once again the reading is one-sided because the poet remains in a state of psychological estrangement from the natural world. Ross' gendered reading does not discern any sort of progress for the poet; in fact the poet remains in a state of stasis:

...the romantic poet moves farther and farther within in an attempt to find the source of the self, in an attempt to embrace all that is without. Imagination, that capacity which apotheosises individual vision, is also a going out of self. It is simultaneously the egotistical sublime and negative capability. Imagination is the attempt to stabilise the world, for whatever one calls that external expanse that delimits selfhood by destabilising the self that seems to block the potential for total vision, the potential for totally embracing that outer expanse. The poet's relation to the world, much like his relation to his father, is fraught with anxiety, because the apparent externality of that world threatens the necessary myth that he fathers vision by fathering himself.²³

The opening lines summarise Ross' position in the post-Bloomian critical tradition; the poet "moves farther and farther within in an attempt to find the source of the self, in an attempt to embrace all that is without." This is a one-sided reading of Wordsworth that, even more so than Bloom, misses the truly dialectical nature of

Wordsworth's enterprise. In actual fact the poet struggles with and eventually interiorises the "external expanse" in order to gain a more complete understanding of the interior self. Ross however, and somewhat contradictorily, goes on to describe how imagination *is* an attempt to go "out of self." However, he sees this (again in psychoanalytical terms) as a problematic journey because the outer-world "threatens the necessary myth that he fathers vision by fathering himself." Unfortunately Ross misses the tenor of Wordsworth's dialectic. It is certainly the case, as I have outlined, that Wordsworth tropes his relationship with nature at times like a relationship between two human subjects; and that Wordsworth sometimes (as part of the aesthetic struggle) further presents this in terms of a master-slave relationship. However, in his poetry Wordsworth constantly embodies this experience, moving into a higher plane of awareness, through his own form of *concrete universal*. He "bestows new splendour" by this interiorisation of the outer whereby the inner becomes a richer space.

5. Contingency and embodiment.

Ann Mellor also reads Wordsworth dialectically, and also sees his relationship in terms of estrangement from the external world, which is equally not a fully developed elaboration of Wordsworth's organicism. Mellor goes as far as to see Wordsworth's relationship with the world in Cartesian terms, thus with no organic engagement between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*. Mellor claims:

Despite Wordsworth's myriad sensory interactions with nature as a child and man, his minute and detailed recollections of what he saw and heard and felt, his self remains curiously disembodied—we never hear whether he is hot or cold, whether he washes himself or defecates, whether he has sexual desires or intercourse. The Wordsworthian self thus becomes a Kantian transcendental ego, pure mind or reason, standing as the spectator *ab extra*...²⁴

Mellor misses a number of crucial points in Wordsworth here. Wordsworth not only interacts with nature, but also finds crucial stages of embodiment of his imaginative

vision within the natural world. His relationship to the external world is not one that is contingent, but actually entails a necessary connection that aids him in “fathering” his vision. Embodiment is a recurring theme in Wordsworth’s poetry and it reappears in different guises in his work. Throughout the dialectical movement between the imagination and the external world there are examples of embodiment of Wordsworth’s imagination in the external world on the one hand and his hopes in another human subject (similar to Coleridge in “Dejection” and “Constancy”) on the other. I propose that for Wordsworth, embodiment works in that it creates a *necessary* connection between the imagination and the external world, and by extension helps to facilitate the interiorisation that leads to his organicism. In contrast, Coleridge ends up with the explicitly self-consciously divided and *disembodied* aesthetic of “Constancy,” which results from his philosophically contingent connection between the imagination and the external world; a connection from which Coleridge ultimately wishes to completely free the imagination, in order to gain a pure intellectual intuition.

To begin with, there are various instances when Wordsworth alludes to the requirement of embodiment in a number of passages in the first book of the 1805-06 *Prelude*. For example, when adumbrating his rationale for writing a philosophical epic he claims:

...I had hopes
 Still higher, that with a frame of outward life,
 I might endue, might fix in a visible home
 Some portion of those phantoms of conceit
 That had been floating loose about so long, (1805-06, 1, 128-132)

The romantic poet requires for his philosophical enterprise a “frame of outward life” or an embodiment for his “phantoms of conceit.” At this philosophically undeveloped stage there is still a contingent relationship between his mind’s

“phantoms of conceit” and the “visible home” in which he would like to “fix” them. The implication in these lines is that “conceit” is identified with “floating”, “phantoms” and “loose” thoughts; embodiment is a necessary prerequisite for the poet to *frame* these thoughts. Wordsworth develops his argument later in the first book by describing his self-justification for the position of poet of the modernised-Milonic epic by explicitly addressing his poetic vitalism and his receptivity to external datum.

When, as becomes a man who would prepare
For such a glorious work, I through myself
Make rigorous inquisition, the report
Is often chearing; For I neither seem
To lack, that first great gift! the vital soul,
Nor general truths which are themselves a sort
Of Elements and Agents, Under-Powers,
Subordinate helpers of the living mind.
Nor am I naked in external things,
Forms, images; nor numerous other aids
Of less regard, though won perhaps with toil,
And needful to build up a Poet's praise. (1805-06, 1, 158-169)

In these lines Wordsworth seems to stratify his poetic imagination into three layers; firstly there is the vital soul, which can be compared to Coleridge's “esemplastic” imagination; then we have general truths which are the truths of the fancy that act in a supporting fashion to the higher faculty: “underpowers/ Subordinate helpers.” Finally he signals “external things” and “Forms, images”, by which he alludes to empirical realism and Platonic forms. This is important in that he is problematising the Platonic notion of forms and in effect relegating the external to a tertiary level below the romantic imagination and the fancy—however it is still “needful” for the full functioning of the poet's imagination. The superordinate “external things” suggests, contrary to Platonic philosophy, that our world is not a copy of an anterior and perfect original, but that the mind is in the higher position to any external reality or form. In effect the poet's place is reversed by Wordsworth and now becomes of

the utmost importance, contrary to Plato's original idea of banishing poets from the *Republic*. This stratification of Wordsworth's is still in the early stage for the developing poet's mind—stratification implies that there is still no *metaphysical equipoise* for the poet because of the implied economy of distinction between the poet's idealism and the external world. However, in order for the poet to proceed with his higher task he needs a primary model of stratification in place—a model later to be superseded by a more balanced (and organic) relationship between the inner and the outer worlds—where both exist in a coalition of both perfect symmetry and interaction. On the other hand, for Coleridge there is a need for the visionary mind to dig even deeper than this stratified model in order to discover the higher, metaphysical truths of the “infinite I AM.” Coleridge in effect alienates himself even further from the external world as his philosophy develops towards the aporetic *telos* of an intellectual intuition, wherein the external world becomes evermore subordinate to the inner.

Other examples of embodiment within Wordsworth's work include an *I-thou* dialogue with nature in *The Prelude* (1798-99) as the early version draws to its conclusion. Wordsworth requires an embodiment in order to substantiate his spiritual faith which he considers could be erroneous—a framework on which to build this vision, or a canvas on which to deploy his ‘painterly’ language:

*If this be error, and another faith
Find easier access to the pious mind,
Yet were I grossly destitute of all
Those human sentiments which make this earth
So dear, if I should fail with grateful voice
To speak of you, ye mountains! and ye lakes
And sounding cataracts! ye mists and winds
That dwell among the hills where I was born.*

.....
The blessing of my life, the gift is yours,
Ye mountains, thine, O nature! Thou hast fed
My lofty speculations, and in thee

For this uneasy heart of ours I find
 A never-failing principle of joy
 And purest passion. (1798-99, 2, 465-472, 491-496. *my italics*)

For Wordsworth there is a sense of faith that is enforced in the subjunctive address to nature whereby the poet questions his initial faith and finds that it stands finally in receptivity to the mountains and scenery that has surrounded him in his formative years. He manoeuvres his argument towards a direct address “To speak of *you, ye* mountains and *ye* lakes.” Moreover, Wordsworth concludes his address by claiming that in nature he finds joy that acts as a balm for “this uneasy heart of ours”; thereby he makes a claim for the moral influence of nature upon humanity. For Wordsworth therefore, nature is not only important for the functioning of the romantic imagination, but also for our moral health.

6. Doubt and embodiment in “Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the banks of the Wye during a tour, July 13, 1798.”²⁵

One major source of embodiment for Wordsworth that I would like to examine is the ‘other’ and here we encounter the particularly Hegelian sense of mutuality as a source of recognition for the romantic poet’s aesthetic hopes. As I mentioned in the last chapter, there is a form of recognition for Coleridge, both teleological and existential, found in Sara Hutchinson and Hartley. In effect, Coleridge attempts to embody his *hopes* in other human beings and thus seek a recognition or affirmation through the ‘other’ in his work, as he has failed to secure recognition of *himself* in the external world. A poem in which Wordsworth works through his dialectical experience of the inner and the outer and in which he finishes with a sense of recognition in another is “Lines Composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey”—a poem that Wordsworth wrote having read “Frost at Midnight.” Whereas Coleridge projects his hopes both onto his son and into the future, Wordsworth projects his

hopes onto his sister, Dorothy. In this poem Wordsworth works through his dialectical experience, reaching an organic connection to nature through his imagination, before finally recognising and reinforcing his own hopes in his sister, Dorothy.²⁵

Wordsworth commences the poem using devices such as repetition and metonymy in order to open the vista before the ‘spectating’ reader, and he also connects the mental and the physical landscape:

-Once again
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
Which on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
The landscape with the quiet of the sky. (4-8)

The sublime cliffs act as an agent of transference between the physical landscape and the poet’s imaginative mind; the cliffs “impress” sensationist thoughts upon “a wild secluded scene” and therefore the thoughts of the poet are impressed not only *by* the lofty cliffs, but also in turn *upon* the secluded scene. The mental landscape also runs deeper than the valley itself with its “thoughts of more deep seclusion”—however it remains that without the sensationist psychological ‘jolt’ of the sublime the poet would not experience his deeper thoughts. He then proceeds to ‘lead’ the reader through the physicality of the landscape, from the sublime, to the beautiful and the picturesque—the “orchard-tufts” (11), “woods and copses” (13), “hedge rows” (16) and “pastoral farms” (17) to the inner recesses of the mind, before he finally lays the “corporeal frame” (44) asleep and sees “into the life of things” (49). Therefore, Wordsworth works in an associationist manner in tracing his ideas back to an original source and through this arrives at a *mystical* juncture, (as opposed to an intellectual intuition) having moved from the sublime imagery of the first lines to more picturesque imagery, to certain aspects of the landscape, to the poet’s own

“corporeal frame” and finally to the pantheistic “life of things.” However, Wordsworth at this point encounters the first of two major metaphysical doubts within the poem—doubts regarding his own pantheist vision. This tension has been partially created by Wordsworth through his use of associationist imagery to reach his supposedly pantheist station. “...sensations sweet,/ Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart,/ And passing even into my purer mind” (28-30). The poem in effect moves from embodied towards more disembodied imagery—from the blood and the heart to the “purer mind.” This mixture of imagery in tracing the poet’s link to a pantheist universe is something that does not quite satisfy his deeper metaphysical aspirations, and so he has to tackle his subject from a different angle. He goes on to question his belief hitherto with the following lines:

If this
 Be but a vain belief, yet, oh! how oft,
 In darkness, and amid the many shapes
 Of joyless daylight; when the fretful stir
 Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,
 Have hung upon the beatings of my heart,
 How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee
 O sylvan Wye!... (50-57)

In this next movement of the poem Wordsworth voices his doubt and calls upon his imaginative powers rehearsed in solitude to support his argument. The argument however is now situated in a space between the imaginative and the empirical—a space where Wordsworth has gained a *sense* of imaginative autonomy but only due to his previous moral encounter with the landscape of Monmouthshire and rehearsal of the scene in his memory. In the next lines Wordsworth describes the process by which the imagination, in Hartman’s phraseology once again “rises” up against the present physical image:

And now, with gleams of half-extinguish’d thought,
 With many recognitions dim and faint,
 And somewhat of a sad perplexity,

The picture of the mind revives again: (59-62)

Here Wordsworth conveys a sense of specular *dedoublement* due to the fact that he brings into the experiential present “gleams of half-extinguished thought” and “recognitions dim and faint.” The thoughts are representations that are “half-extinguished” because they interfere with the empirical experience of the abbey in the experiential present. This leads to a “sad perplexity” for the poet five years after his last visit to the abbey, due to the sense of loss the poet has experienced since his first visit in 1793. The picture “of the mind” is a reference to the fact that the poet is depicting the image of the valley and the abbey as represented in his mind—the process is a transformative one, the original *imagined* scene in fact disappears and reappears in a *dedoubled* sense in the present and thus symbolises Wordsworth’s sense of an ongoing and divisive dialectic between the imagination and the natural world, which further suggests a dualism that prevents an experience of pure *aesthesis* for the poet. Wordsworth also becomes self-conscious of a temporal gap that cannot in any sense be overcome by the poet working in this sense of an exegesis of past experience conjoined with present realities; this perplexes a poet seeking unification or pure *aesthesis* in his work.

However, this sense of temporality and division works both aetiologically and teleologically: Wordsworth actually realises through this experience that there will be yet another experience whereby the present becomes a specular reflection, which at some point in the experiential future will “revive again.” He goes on to say “While here I stand, not only with the sense/ Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts/ That in this moment there is life and food/ For future years”. (63-66). He finds consolation in the fact that even as there is a dialectic working between past memories and present experience, there is also a cataphoric effect wherein the

present experience is nourished by past memories. The imagination helps in effect to bind experience together in a unity, and this unity is the highest representation (in the human mind) of a unified, organically connected universe. Up until this point of the poem, Wordsworth has engaged with a dialectical experience of the world that has vacillated between the imaginative mind and the external world. Although the argument at the end of the first part of the poem ran to a pantheistic conclusion, he has entered into a second argument where he concludes that there is a *natura naturans* that runs through all things and binds his imaginative mind to the natural world:

...And I have felt
 A presence that disturbs me with the joy
 Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
 Of something far more deeply interfused,
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
 And the round ocean, and the living air,
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,
 A motion and a spirit, that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things. (94-103)

Therefore past and present are fused together by the imagination that, whilst causing “sad perplexity” at the apparent dichotomy between the two experiences, also paradoxically binds the past present and future together in a narrative unity. From this logic Wordsworth deduces the “spirit” that “impels/ All thinking things.” Wordsworth has worked through his dialectic and formed his synthesis of inner and outer experience, through an organic connection between the mind and the natural world, a spirit that also exists “in the mind of man,” with the unifying imagination at its head.

In the final section of the poem there is a reprise, which is much slower in pace and which incorporates more metaphysical doubt for the poet, this time countered by the embodiment of his hopes in his sister. The poet continues with the lines “Nor,

perchance,/ *If I were not thus taught*, should I the more/ Suffer my genial spirits to decay:/ For thou art with me, here, upon the banks/ Of this fair river;” (112-116), *my italics*. At this point, Wordsworth seeks embodiment within the figure of his sister Dorothy, in a movement that counters his own still lingering metaphysical doubts about his pantheistic argument. Wordsworth appears to be saying to her *you are here in this experiential moment and in the future you too shall feel the imaginative impulse that I feel*. However, Wordsworth differs from Coleridge in that he *does not displace* his own failures, he simply recognises himself and these burgeoning impulses in Dorothy. Further, he is dealing, not as in Coleridge, in someone who will have what he *never had*, but with someone (Dorothy was only 20 months younger) who has experienced the same natural landscapes and walking tours and in whom he *recognises* this mutuality. Therefore, Dorothy not only presents an embodiment of Wordsworth’s hopes, but he also experiences recognition in his sister as *fellow* poet-seer. And in the final lines Wordsworth alludes to the importance of both the embodying landscape *and* sister: “And this green pastoral landscape, were to me/ More dear, both for themselves, and for thy sake.” (159-60). Wordsworth claims that the landscape holds a restorative function both for himself and for his sister, yet this is only from Wordsworth’s own perspective: how can the landscape be dear to me for *your* sake? This is because there is a strong sense of mutual recognition between two agents, in which case we read the lines as “I see restorative value in this natural scene through your perception of the restorative value of this scene.” This is a very Hegelian ending to the poem, whereby the poet, by means of immanent recognition through his sister, feels the elation of the scene impressed upon them both, and feels a communion between the two agents through their *mutual experience* of the natural landscape. The landscape acts in an

intermediate fashion for the two agents—according to Wordsworth’s representations, both perceive a unifying force between themselves and the landscape, which *a fortiori* binds them both to each other. Wordsworthian mutual recognition does not happen at the level of two subjective consciousnesses alone. Wordsworthian recognition works primarily at the level of *Naturphilosophie*, wherein the subjects recognise a sense of themselves as part of the external world. In a kind of second-order recognition the poet then recognises a logically common experience through the mediative encounter with nature for both himself and a second agent. The poet has his imagination released through initial communion with the landscape, before returning to the landscape as the “anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse, the guide...” and then returning in a coda to Dorothy, who settles his further doubts through a *second* act of embodiment. He experiences recognitive embodiment whereby each is caught in the existential moment and has mutual “food” for the future. In this dialectical movement from self to the external world to another subject and back to himself, Wordsworth establishes an internalisation of both the natural world *and* his sister as an inter-subjective consciousness and counters his own doubts by recognising a mutual experience of nature in his sister. Contrastively, Coleridge only manages to project his future hopes onto his son, because he firstly fails to secure a primary recognition of his life organically within the landscape and he has no existential other with whom he can share his present experience of the world, however divided that experience may be.

7. “Home” at Grasmere: Embodiment

In *Home at Grasmere* Wordsworth signals his experience of nature in the experiential present and solidifies the sense of a pastoral embodiment for the poet’s visionary mind—this time in the Vale of Grasmere—represented as an Elysian

paradise *on earth*. In embodying the visionary imagination within the vale, he attempts to render a necessary connection between his imagination and the physical landscape. By accomplishing this he hopes to bring into fruition a more immediate experience for himself and the reader, a more *authentic* experience—an experience that renders all metaphysical knowledge a part of the experiential present. This goal is attained by a psychological and physical *appropriation* of the landscape, which leads to an organic connection between the poet's mind and the external world. This poem therefore moves beyond the reticent doubts of previous poems such as "Tintern Abbey" and into a more philosophically developed mode of consciousness where the poet is no longer a wanderer—physically or metaphysically; the poet gains a physical and metaphysical home in Grasmere. This scheme of Wordsworth's is due to the fact that book one of *The Recluse* was originally designed to be read after *The Prelude*, which was to lay the foundation for the main text. Therefore, *The Prelude* would serve as the "antechamber" which would bring the reader up to date with the experiential present—the now authentic experience enshrined within the Vale of Grasmere.

Wordsworth quickly switches to the present after recalling his visit to the Vale as a young boy. After commencing with an anaphoric temporal frame similar to those of "Tintern Abbey" and *The Prelude*, wherein he ruminates upon his memories of first visiting the Vale as a boy, he exclaims:

From that time forward was the place to me
 As beautiful in thought as it had been
 When present to my bodily eyes; a haunt
 Of my affections, oftentimes in joy
 A brighter joy, in sorrow (but of that
 I have known little), in such gloom, at least,
 Such damp of the gay mind as stood to me
 In place of sorrow, 'twas a gleam of light.
 And now 'tis mine for life: dear Vale, (44-52)

The poet extols his delight at his present condition; after having discussed the failings of himself as a younger man (and of the human race as a whole) he embraces his secularised vision of an Elysian paradise here on earth. This reduces the temporal lag and the gap between temporal signifier and signified he experiences when discussing spots of time or former experiences recaptured in tranquility. Wordsworth is attempting a temporal closure of an experiential gap, which is why he alludes to the fact that in the past the Vale was “As beautiful in thought as it had been/ When present to my bodily eyes” this line could of course be applied to “Tintern Abbey” or to many of the episodes in *The Prelude*, and summarises the dialectical nature of Wordsworth’s poetics up until this new *Gestalt* in the experiential present. This line also demarcates a previously contingent relationship between the body and the mind; one however which the poet *symbolically* closes in the necessary embodiment he tropes within the Vale of Grasmere. The line “And now ‘tis mine for life: dear Vale” abruptly breaks the rhythm of the meter down to iambic tetrameter and brings the reader suddenly into the present. Wordsworth leads the reader down into the Vale with him so to speak, having broken the early metrical pattern in order to draw our attention to this end-stop; we are in fact the arrested traveler, arrested by our poet-guide. The sense of ownership is paramount here; there is a physical ownership (his cottage) and a psychological ownership of the Vale itself. This ownership symbolises Wordsworth’s interiorisation of the natural world as it becomes a part of the poet’s inner consciousness, and in turn embodies his visionary hopes in an immanent present. In recent dialectical episodes Wordsworth had spoken of nature “rising up” against the poet, however now the fully matured (post-apocalyptic Snowdonian vision) poet fully appropriates the externality of

nature. Wordsworth then resumes in pentameter the discussion of his now contemporary perspective.

Wordsworth's celebration of the experiential present, and his burgeoning sense of an earthly embodiment of heavenly bliss, or *Deus sive natura* are particularly pronounced in the following lines:

This solitude is mine; the distant thought
Is fetched out of the heaven in which it was.
The unappropriated bliss hath found
An owner, and that owner I am he.
The Lord of this enjoyment is on Earth
And in my breast. What wonder if I speak
With fervour, am exalted with the thought
Of my possessions, of my genuine wealth
Inward and outward? What I keep have gained,
Shall gain, must gain, if sound be my belief
From past and present rightly understood
That in my day of childhood I was less
The mind of Nature, less, take all in all,
Whatever may be lost, than I am now. (83-96)

Continuing the theme of ownership, Wordsworth here speaks of the “unappropriated bliss” having found an owner in himself. The “bliss” appears to have come from “out of heaven” and is a *pure* bliss. However, contrary to Jonathan Wordsworth's suggestion that Wordsworth requires a “supernatural frame of reference” we find that the goodness has become dislocated from a heavenly abode and instead embodied within the Vale of Grasmere. He goes on to claim that “the Lord of this enjoyment is on earth”—another allusion to a Christianity that is once again displaced into the natural surroundings of Grasmere. He further speaks of his gifts both “Inward and outward” because the organic wealth of nature both permeates his senses and his inner mind, and is a wealth of religious proportions; the satisfaction received from nature is further an internal satisfaction.

The modal phrases “Have gained,” “Must gain” and “shall gain” signify a self-conscious awareness of temporality in Wordsworth's present speculations, and he

further adds that he was previously less “than I am now.” This temporal awareness instantiates the idea that Wordsworth is self-consciously situating his experience not only in the spatial realm of Grasmere, but also in the temporal realm, further adding to the earth-bound implications of his joy. This supports Paul de Man’s argument adumbrated in the last chapter, because Wordsworth is in one sense exposing himself to the vicissitudes of temporality, and self-consciously recognising an almost Humean scepticism in his observations. Once again metaphysical equipoise is countered by a metaphysical doubt about the veracity of his *earthbound*, *temporal* and *present* speculations. He continues the empiricist line of argument by stating that “if sound be my belief/ From past and present rightly understood.” The conditional clause points to his own even deeper self-awareness of the implications of an organic argument that apodictically places him in the space of the empirically realist, due to the embodiment of his metaphysical hopes in the temporal/spatial realm.

However, Wordsworth goes on to counter these doubts using the telling lines “I was less/ The mind of Nature, less, take all in all,/ Whatever may be lost, than I am now.” The “mind of nature” that Wordsworth has become reorients the poet in the direction of his faith in his teleological organicism; the “mind of nature” implies the interiorisation of nature by the poet. Wordsworth himself experiences a sense of unity in and through nature, and therefore the mind of nature is one that through a powerful receptivity to the natural world actually becomes one with the entelechy or the grander creative processes of the natural world. This is a progressive process, in that previously the younger Wordsworth was not the mind of nature, whereas he has now become, through the vehicle of his philosophical poetry, something higher: he is now the mind or Spirit-head of the natural world. He returns to Grasmere (as also

to Tintern Abbey), with a feeling of imaginative connection to the external world of nature. He has found a home in nature, a home metonymically realized in Grasmere Valley. However, where Tintern Abbey was a transient experience for Wordsworth—one that helped to demonstrate the spiritual link between the past and the present, his “home” in Grasmere has the permanence for which the poet has been striving both in his physical journeys and his philosophical journeys. Of course this sense of home, a very British sense perhaps, stands in distinction to Novalis’ more cosmopolitan notion of *Gefühl*. Wordsworth and Coleridge in this sense share a different conception of “home” from their German counterpart. It is hard to imagine Novalis settling for a “home” at Grasmere. This sense of home further sheds light on the more settled aesthetic sought by Wordsworth in that home is a figure of metonymy for a settled philosophical conception of the universe, as opposed to the *Fülle* celebrated by the *Frühromantiker*. Wordsworth’s final conception of “home” also stands in contrast to Coleridge’s sense of homelessness and dividedness in “Constancy to an Ideal Object” in which the poet yearns for his “English home” symbolised by his unattainable ideal and his love for the corporeal figure of Sara Hutchinson.

The poem culminates with the seminal *high romantic argument*, wherein Wordsworth announces the “spousal” relationship between the mind and nature, which transpires after Wordsworth’s representation of the experiential situation encountered in 1799. The first lines of the argument refer to Wordsworth’s journey into a region deeper than heaven and hell—the “mind of Man.” In dark tones he claims of his epic journey:

Jehovah, with his thunder, and the quire
Of shouting angels and the empyreal throne -
I pass them unalarmed. The darkest Pit
Of the profoundest Hell, chaos, night,

Nor aught of [blinder] vacancy scooped out
 By help of dreams can breed such fear and awe
 As fall upon us often when we look... (982-988)

Wordsworth is self-consciously taking on the mantle formerly carried by Milton in *Paradise Lost* and equally self-consciously attempting to go further, to displace the biblical myth into a secular myth of modernity.²⁶ This even more perilous journey is:

Into our minds, into the mind of Man,
 My haunt and the main region of my song.
 Beauty, whose living home is the green earth,
 Surpassing the most fair ideal Forms
 The craft of delicate spirits hath composed
 From earth's materials, waits upon my steps,
 Pitches her tents before me when I move,
 An hourly Neighbour... (989-996)

Wordsworth situates his argument in the mind of man and goes on to embody “Beauty” in the “living home” of earth, acknowledging the embodiment of beauty that surpasses “the most ideal fair Forms” thereby distancing himself from a Platonic position by identifying the highest beauty here in this empirical world, embodied in the Vale of Grasmere. The secular and natural beauty of the earth is a beauty which, according to Abrams, is a quasi-biblical beauty.²⁷ In fact Abrams claims of this great consummation:

The event [the holy marriage at the end of time] however, is transported from the indefinite future to the experiential present, and translated from external intervention to an act of unaided vision, in which the lamb and the New Jerusalem are replaced by man’s mind as the bridegroom and nature as the bride. But this “great consummation” will nevertheless suffice to create the restored paradise predicted in the apocalypse.²⁸

Time is once again a major factor as Wordsworth removes Christian eschatology from the “great consummation” and in so doing sets it in the “experiential present.” Of course this also implies a deeper spousal connection between the poet’s mind and the natural world, which is a symbolic representation of the organicism as the tenor

of this marriage metaphor. The argument concludes with Wordsworth's explicit proclamation of his high romantic argument:

How exquisitely the individual Mind
 (And the progressive powers perhaps no less
 Of the whole species) to the external world
 Is fitted; and how exquisitely too -
 Theme this but little heard of among men -
 The external world is fitted to the mind;
 And the creation (by no lower name
 Can it be called) which they with blended might
 Accomplish: this is my great argument. (1006-1014)

He finalises the argument by explicitly discussing the nature of the mind's fitting to the external world. He uses the phrase "progressive powers no less of the whole species" and places it in parenthesis as an aside—this aside however is key for it alludes to the progressive nature of his encounters with the natural world, "powers" that can be applied teleologically to the whole human species. What is implicit here is that any progressive powers that we are predisposed to are, to use the ergative form "fitted" to the external world and don't require external determination, by any "supernatural" agency. Any teleology is reliant upon interaction with the natural world, with the *telos* of this interaction being the "marriage" of these entities. He then reverses the nouns and speaks of how "The external world is fitted to the mind." This is for Wordsworth a two-way process, where the mind is fitted to the external world and the external world is symmetrically fitted to the mind. Their "blended might" forge "the creation" and this blending is only possible through a completely gnostic understanding of nature which is expressed through the persona of the lyric speaker. The creation here is removed from the need for any "supernatural frame of reference" and this creation further does not require any intellectual intuition, just the progressive moments of Wordsworth's narrative. In this organic state nature reaches its highest point in the mind of the poet and the

poet's mind reaches its largest area of expansion through embodiment in the external world.

When Coleridge tellingly uses the marriage metaphor (combined with death) in "Dejection" we can discern a more one-sided representation of the figure "*Ours* is her wedding-garment, *ours* her shroud!" Coleridge is depicting a relationship from the perspective of an unhappy consciousness, which in failing to interiorise the external world remains beached upon its own incumbent subjectivism. He also remains alienated from the external world, projecting the possibility of a going-out-of-oneself on to the joy embodied by the "other" Sara Hutchinson. Coleridge's other possible avenue of escape (from his dialectical aporia) is through the *possibility* of love in the Hegelian sense. However, this is something never firmly established in his poem—Coleridge seems to *acknowledge* the need for receptivity in order to gain a higher mode of being—but through an act of *avoidance* seems unable to interiorise the outer-world into a fully concrete universal conception of the universe.

8. The unifying nature of the Wordsworthian Symbol

Simon Jarvis has recently commented upon the philosophical nature of Wordsworth's language, or one may say the *performative* function of poetic language in Wordsworth. For Jarvis, this language has a cognitive function, and is not fitted to a pre-existing philosophical discursive model but functions itself philosophically:

It might mean, not that philosophy get fitted into a song—where all the thinking is done by philosophy and only the handiwork by verse—but that the song itself, as *song*, is philosophic. It might mean that a different kind of thinking happens in verse—that instead of being a sort of thoughtless ornament or reliquary for thinking, verse is itself a kind of cognition, with its own resources and difficulties.²⁹

This analysis is I feel correct in that it points to the philosophically performative nature of the figures used by Wordsworth, and I feel that his trope often attempts, as

cognition, to introduce a monistic ontology to the forefront of our thinking. Central to this philosophically performative nature of the language is Wordsworth's use of the symbol, which acts in a unifying fashion to which I now turn.

Wordsworth's use of language in *The Prelude* has been discussed in terms of the use of romantic metaphor by, amongst others, Lindenberger and de Man. In this section I would like to build on their discussion and demonstrate how Wordsworth defines a romantic use of symbol through a use of signifiers that point on the one hand to a signified such as *stream*, *river*, *moon* and on the other at their own status-as-object in partaking in the *Fülle* of the metaphysical universe. Using Jakobson's famous distinction between metaphor and metonymy,³⁰ I believe that Wordsworthian symbols actually work on *both* a metonymic or syntagmatic axis (where they need a context, such as features of the landscape for their function) and a metaphoric one, through which they function paradigmatically and metaphysically, partaking directly in the infinite *Fülle*. This is because using the metaphoric axis does not require contiguity in time and space, but *similarity* between two things that are otherwise different. Thus the moon can symbolically represent the imagination because it lights up the world, as does the romantic imagination. And more importantly, symbol for Wordsworth, as for Coleridge, is more than just a rhetorical figure, but functions in a metaphysical sense, partaking synechdochically in the infinite. Wordsworthian symbols thus also function *both* allegorically (in time and in a contiguous context) and symbolically or a-temporally on the paradigmatic scale, where they signify *an aspect* of the infinite universe. Consequently, because of this structural function of symbol in Wordsworth, there is no symbolic autonomy without receptivity to context at the *syntagmatic* level. This is in effect Wordsworth's attempt at a rhetorical unity, in order to further deepen his overall

organic sense of unity, by which he correlates the natural world with the metaphysical world.

De Man claims of Wordsworth's use of romantic symbol the inherent desire to collapse the distinction between language as figuration and language as an object partaking in the universe, or language as simple signifier to an anterior signified and language as a self-sufficient entity partaking in the universal *Fülle*. De Man writes:

Poetic language seems to originate in the desire to draw closer and closer to the ontological status of the object, and its growth and development are determined by this inclination. [...] At times, romantic thought and romantic poetry seem to come so close to giving in completely to the nostalgia for the object that it becomes difficult to distinguish between object and image, between imagination and perception, between an expressive or constitutive and a mimetic or literal language. This may well be the case in some passages of Wordsworth and Goethe, of Baudelaire and Rimbaud, where the vision almost seems to become a real landscape.³¹

This closed space between object and image or imagination and perception is the space where Wordsworth attempts to operate his rhetoric in order to transform the ontological status of his signifiers and provide them with a self-sufficient metaphysical presence, at least with regards to his use of symbol. However, as I argued in the last chapter, total closure of the gap between signifiers and signifieds is an impossible object for poetry, and the signifier is always dependent upon its i) relationship to other signifiers within the syntagmatic plane and ii) its sense of inscription *upon* a reality which is always anterior in order to represent the world *mediatively*. De Man goes on to claim of the search for reification in the self-sufficient linguistic figure that, "The nostalgia [in the poetic figure] for the object has become a nostalgia for an entity that could never, by its very nature, become a particularised presence."³² Wordsworth is attempting to *mystify* his trope and in so doing collapse the rhetorical—or temporal—gap between the signifiers and signified.

Lindenberger makes a similar claim for what amounts to a collapse of distinctions between the tenor and the vehicle in *The Prelude*, claiming that this collapse places Wordsworth in a stylistic space somewhere between symbolism and realism. “He [Wordsworth] can reveal it [the past] in all its concrete fullness and he can use it as a symbol of still another world behind it. He can be both symbolist and realist at once.”³³ This construction of his poesy actually places Wordsworth in the position I have been arguing for throughout this chapter: the poet seeking to unify the philosophical dichotomy opened by romantic philosophy, attempting to ground his poetry in an *aesthetic aesthesis*. This is the unifying romantic framework that lies behind part of Wordsworth’s conceptualisation of symbol.

Examples of Wordsworth’s use of symbol in this metaphysical sense can be found once again in *The Prelude*, particularly in the section of book six where Wordsworth explicitly addresses symbol and the romantic imagination. Wordsworth famously commences the scene by couching the appearance of Mont Blanc in a language of estrangement:

That day we first
Beheld the summit of Mont Blanc, and grieved
To have a soulless image on the eye,
Which had usurp’d upon a living thought
That never more could be: the wondrous Vale
Of Chamouny did on the following dawn,
With its dumb cataracts and streams of ice,
A motionless array of mighty waves,
Five rivers broad and vast, make rich amends
And reconcil’d us to realities. (1805-06, 6, 452-461)

The estrangement between the poet’s imagination and the “soulless image” is similar to that encountered in “Tintern Abbey” when the poet feels “sad perplexity” at his remembered image and the present image of the Welsh valley, although in the former case he is referring to a *preconceived* idea about the landscape; the next day he becomes “reconciled to realities” by the scene below in the Vale of Chamouny.

The stark image of the mountaintop as “soulless image” is due to the fact that the symbol of the imagination has become soulless after its representation in its literal counterpart, the actual mountaintop. The original image or concept of the summit was one that remained *disembodied* and dislocated from its literal counterpart. An image only takes on a true, *soulful* life when represented in concrete figuration. The Vale of Chamouny however, represents a vision of the imagination once again embedded and embodied within a deepening literal landscape—a landscape that in Wordsworth’s imagination had not been preconceived before his actual apprehension of it. This is one important type of romantic symbol that can function in Wordsworth’s universe: a symbol that remains embodied within the natural world, and which in turn is able to reconcile Wordsworth “to realities” whilst representing the infinite. Whereas in “Kubla Khan” Coleridge had been looking for a pure symbolic representation of the imagination at work—and finally only discovered this in an allegorical representation of the symbolic imagination at work—Wordsworth from the outset wishes to embody his use of symbol within the natural world. The soul becomes embodied and grows into a world soul that relies for its embodiment upon the natural world at large.

Additionally, the initial sublime symbolism of the “dumb cataracts,” “streams of ice,” “mighty waves” and rivers “broad and vast” of the Vale of Chamouny functions on a syntagmatic axis because it stands in contextual contrast to other aspects of the physical landscape of the vale. These phrases take on a more poignant resonance when juxtaposed with the lines directly following, which become more pastoral and picturesque, metonymically re-setting the landscape in contrast to the more barren preceding figures:

There small birds warble from the leafy trees,
 The Eagle soareth in the element;
 There doth the reaper bind the yellow sheaf,
 The Maiden spread the hay-cock in the sun,
 While Winter like a tamed lion walks
 Descending from the mountain to make sport
 Among the cottages by beds of flowers. (1805-06, 6, 462-468)

The fecund imagery of harvesting now acts in literal contrast to the preceding frigidity of the “soulless image” of the glacial heights of the mountain, and adds an organic bent to the sublime imagery of the frozen rivers and waterfalls through contextual figures and combinations such as “small birds,” “eagle soareth.” “reapers bind the yellow sheath” and “The maiden spread the haycock in the sun.” This axis of signification binds the original figure of the summit of Mont Blanc to the contextual features of the valley below and this is the structural aesthetic that gives Wordsworthian symbols their dual-referentiality: the linguistic figure partakes in the infinite as a self-sufficient entity on the one hand, but correspondingly functions within the contextual structure of the landscape. This in turn binds the symbol to the *physical and the metaphysical*, and is the source of what for Lindenberger is the collapse of the distinction between the tenor and the vehicle of the metaphor. The trope of “Winter like a tamed lion” further acts to domesticate the sublime imagery, a glacial image/lion, to the more pedestrian and harvested landscape of the valley below, performing the further function of wedding the sublime to the more picturesque imagery of the vale. All of these reductions in distance between imagery, figures and tropes, serve the grand Wordsworthian project of “marital” unification and synthetic progression.

Wordsworth furthermore goes on to trope nature as a book, which once again points to the idea of a mediated encounter that ultimately promotes our *reception* of the natural world as perhaps deictically indicating *higher truths*. David Perkins

claims that Wordsworth, in apprehending these higher truths also emblemises the marriage trope central to his romantic philosophy:

...they [ultimate truths] reveal themselves in the processes of the imagination by which the human mind weds itself to nature. They are expressed in the visible scene from two sources at the same time, from the human mind and from the divine consciousness in and behind all things, the Nature in nature, so to speak. And in turn *these truths are reflected back to us in the landscape as we perceive it, thus becoming objects of cognition. (My italics)*³⁴

Wordsworth in effect interprets the “semiotics” of the landscape. This serves to demonstrate the process of cognitive recognition that the poet experiences in cognizing truths symbolically apparent within the external landscape, when the experience is lifted to the higher awareness of the imaginative plane. This process is however a process of reading and therefore of mediation, which is in no way a *direct apprehension* of truth(s). Moreover, Wordsworth delineates a natural hermeneutics only graspable through our own higher faculty of reason facilitating our reading of these symbols in the landscape. He writes of this experience in the vale of Chamouny:

...With such a book
Before our eyes we could not chuse but read
A frequent lesson of sound tenderness,
The universal reason of mankind, (1805-06, 6, 473-476)

The statement “we could not chuse but read” sums up the poet’s epistemic position as one which uses apodictic logic in order to facilitate his *codex-trope*. This statement also points towards a kind of Hegelianism in some of Wordsworth’s work—the idea that the ultimate truths are derived from reason—and this reason unfolds itself in features of the universe. He attempts to find unity in a “spousal” relationship between the mind and nature, however in contrast to Hegel, Wordsworth attempts to signify this synthesis through the medium of the aesthetic symbol rather than through the use of philosophical reason.

In a further dialectical movement, Wordsworth goes on to describe the imagination rising up against his empirical experience of Mont Blanc. In so doing he uses the image of *usurpation*, once again problematising the relationship between imagination and empirical experience. He writes of the secondary imaginative experience, which builds *paradigmatically and symbolically* on the primary empirical experience of Mont Blanc appearing in the traveller's vision:

Imagination! lifting up itself
 Before the eye and progress of my Song
 Like an unfather'd vapour;...

 And now recovering to my Soul I say
 I recognise thy glory; in such strength
 Of usurpation, in such visitings
 Of awful promise, when the light of sense
 Goes out in flashes that have shewn to us
 The invisible world,... (1805-06, 6, 525-527, 531-536)

Wordsworth makes it explicit that the uncontrollable and sublime in nature is paradigmatically “usurped” by the imagination. Even the metaphor of imagination “lifting itself up,” adds to the sense of an ascent of image upon image, of the specular image once again usurping the primary image. The “soulless image that usurped upon a living thought” is thus further usurped by the poet saying in dialogue with his *soul* “I recognise thy glory;” creating supersession of the empirical image upon the eye. The apocalyptic imagination *reincarnates* itself, superseding the sensory image that had originally negated its presence. In a dialectical movement it has interiorised the empirical and in a new synthesis progressed to a higher level where the “light of sense goes out” and the poet glimpses the “invisible world” where the imaginative and the empirical are in fact conjoined in a metaphysical unity. Of course, the “light of sense” only goes “out in flashes” (as opposed to in its entirety) because the poet needs sensory and contextual data in order for his imaginative faculty to function at all. Thus the visitings “of awful promise” are so

described, because at these moments it appears the imaginative can in some way transcend the empirical world.

In the climactic Snowdonian vision of the apocalyptic imagination we see Wordsworth fusing the paradigmatic and syntagmatic poles in order to set the figure of the symbol in the temporal whilst partaking in the eternal and metaphysical. He commences the section with gloomy imagery in order to foreshadow the apocalyptic experience that is to follow, and the imagery functions metonymically and contextually, almost like a realist narrative. "It was a summer's night, a close warm night,/ Wan, dull and glaring, with a dripping mist/ Low-hung and thick that cover'd all the sky," (1805-06, 13, 10-12). These contextual figures further function to signify the eternal and the unknown that Wordsworth is about to partake in. The moon appears and sheds its light upon the whole of the scene, thus symbolising the romantic imagination lighting up the world, whilst also literally lighting the physical landscape for the travellers. Moreover, Wordsworth switches to paradigmatic figuration as he informs us that the moonlight falls "like a flash" (38) and then the "real sea" (49) is "Usurp'd upon as far as sight could reach." (51). Therefore, through crossing the syntagmatic presentation of the landscape with a paradigmatic shift, Wordsworth presents a usurpation of the literal by the specular-imaginative partaking in the infinite. The imagination rises from lower depths, again paradigmatically acting in a protean fashion, moving through the moon, to the sea, to the mist to "...a blue chasm, a fracture in the vapour,/ A deep and gloomy breathing-place, thro' which/ Mounted the roar of waters, torrents, streams/ Innumerable, roaring with one voice." (56-59). The images are the usual Wordsworthian representatives of the imaginative faculty, water, streams, clouds—

and they culminate in the unifying and organic image of “The soul, the Imagination of the whole.” (65).

Wordsworth attempts to blend or “marry” the temporal and literal with the infinite or metaphysical. However, as with Coleridge’s use of symbol, the same issues of mediation between the signifier and signified are still present, even if Wordsworth attempts to reduce this distance with his use of unifying symbol. Wordsworth openly embodies his imaginative vision within an allegorical narrative, which in turn requires metonymic context. He works within the allegorical scope of the quest narrative, and we only see the whole allegorical picture by placing all of the contextual clues together; within this context we read various elements as symbolic because of their place within an overall allegorical framework. When ascending a mountain such as Snowdon or Mont Blanc, Wordsworth leads up to an encounter with the “apocalyptic” imagination in his quest allegory. The authentic symbols of the imagination also interestingly emerge from *below* the poet, who stands at a great height—having achieved what he feels is imaginative percipience. Wordsworth however ends up symbolising an embodied imagination that rises from the vapours below, or the frozen rivers of Chamouny, whereby it is frozen in the earth. The vision, as in the vale of Grasmere, is taken out of heaven and *embodied in the earth*. This is similar to what Hartman has called the “Abyssal vision” and is something that is rooted in metaphysical literature of the past.³⁵ This type of vision suits the Wordsworthian notion of a symbol that works within a physical, syntagmatic and allegorical context in order to also function at a metaphysical level. Once again, as with Coleridge’s use of symbol in “Kubla Khan,” there is a necessary connection between allegory and symbol—and symbol cannot function in a semiotic vacuum. As the imagination is tied to the natural world, itself the highest

representation of the natural world, so the poetic representation of this process is tied to the contextual figures of the metonymic axis, which in actual fact best represents the embodiment of the imagination in the natural world.

9. Conclusion

In rereading Wordsworth in the Hegelian vein we manage to gain many insights into his progress as a poet. Of course there are numerous biographical elements at work here, historical influences such as the French Revolution, and poetical and literary influences from poets such as Cowper and the vogue of travel writing. However, one major area of criticism has brought up the dialectical nature of Wordsworth's poetry and I have attempted here to further the Hegelian reading of his poetry. I have flagged the crucial organicism that on my account results from Wordsworth's dialectical oscillation between the natural world and the self. His interiorisation of the external world through structural devices such as his use of symbol and allegory, and his use of embodiment are all crucial factors that not only play a part in formulating Wordsworth's overall organic conceptualisation of the universe, but also help delineate the crucial differences between himself and Coleridge. These differences stem in part from Coleridge's overall philosophical outlook and the fragmentary expression of this in his poetry, and Wordsworth's ability to recognise himself in the natural world, and foster his own form of *Naturphilosophie*.

Notes

1. I use the phrase “metaphysical equipoise” because the equipoise I argue for in Wordsworth’s poetry is one that gives a sense of balance to the tension between the mind and the external world within the *performative* space of the poetry. I also use the phrase because equipoise designates a space between two poles where one finds a balance, this is in effect a *liminal* space: a threshold between the empirical world and the imaginative mind. Central to my own thesis is the idea that even though Wordsworth presents his ideal romantic vision of unity within his early poetry, this remains a space of reconciliation *between two realms*. These tensions drive romantic thought, but these idealisms are ultimately only symbiotically functional within the context of receptivity to the empirical world. Additionally, I use it in contradistinction to the phrase “metaphysical quietism” designated for Wordsworthian theory and practice by Thomas Shaw. Quoted in Rene Wellek, “The Concept of Romanticism in Literary History” *Comparative Literature*, Vol.1.1, Winter 1949, p.16.
2. Of course this is debatable because Coleridge’s theory was constantly developing and changing, and his most systematic outline was not until the *Biographia Literaria* in 1817. However, considering their German trip together and Coleridge’s early reception of Schelling, (see Chapter Two) it is certain that Coleridge’s transition from Berkeleyan idealism and Hartleyan associationism to his more metaphysical preoccupations and his burgeoning organicism would have been discussed with his counterpart.
3. Edith J. Morley, (ed.) *Correspondence of Crabb Robinson with the Wordsworth Circle Vol.1-1808-1843* (London: Clarendon Press, 1927), p. 407.
4. Simon Jarvis, *Wordsworth’s Philosophic Song* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.3.
5. William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads 1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 156.
6. Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background 1760-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 58, 66.
7. For a useful discussion of the three major forms of ideology, those of the rationalists, the Hegelian/romantics and the Socio/historical (Marx/Heine), see Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press: 1983), pp. 1-39.
8. Frederick Beiser, “The Paradox of Romantic Metaphysics” in Nikolas Kompridis (ed.) *Philosophical Romanticism* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 231.
9. The scholarly evidence regarding Wordsworth’s exact reception of Hartley is scarce to say the least. For an interesting discussion see, John Hayden, “Wordsworth, Hartley and the Revisionists” *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 81, No. 1, Winter, 1981, pp. 94-118. Hayden quotes Wordsworth’s only recorded comment on Hartley in a letter of 1808 as one of the “the men of real power, who go before their age.” p. 94.
10. Jonathan Wordsworth, “The Two-Part Prelude of 1799” in Jonathan Wordsworth, Meyer Abrams and Stephen Gill (ed.) *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850* (New York: Norton, 1979), pp. 575-76.

11. Beiser, p. 243.
12. For an excellent discussion of the twentieth century reception of English Romanticism, and Bradley's role in the rise of Hegelian criticism, see M.H. Abrams, "English Romanticism: The Spirit of the Age" in *The Correspondent Breeze: Essays in English Romanticism* (New York: Norton, 1964), pp. 44-75.
13. A.C. Bradley, "Wordsworth" in *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1909), p.134.
14. For a discussion of the idea of secularized Christianity and the "internal circuitous quest" that Abrams argues permeates all romantic poetry and philosophy, or "the ancient Christian *peregrinatio*." See Abrams' classic study, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971). Especially the section "Forms of Romantic Imagination," pp. 169-195.
15. Abrams, p. 91.
16. In her study *English Romantic Irony* (New York: Harvard, 1980), Ann K. Mellor says of *Natural Supernaturalism* "Meyer Abrams has cogently and persuasively argued that English and German romantic works frequently present a secularized-Judaeo-Christian conception of an ordered, teleological universe in which mankind progresses toward an apocalyptic marriage with the divine and a return to paradise. He is correct, but his failure to discuss either Friedrich Schlegel's concept of romantic irony or its greatest exemplar, Byron's *Don Juan*, should alert us to what Abrams left out of his description of "the spirit of the age." Not all romantic works present a confident movement from innocence to experience to a higher innocence, that circuitous journey which leads the protagonist spiraling upwards to a more self-aware and therefore more meaningful communion with the divine." pp. 5-6.
17. Herbert Lindenberger, *On Wordsworth's Prelude* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 180.
18. G.M. Harper, "Coleridge's Conversation Poems," *Electronic Text Centre: University of Virginia Library*:
http://www.lib.virginia.edu/etext/stc/Coleridge/resources/conv_poems_essay.html (from *English Romantic Poets*, 1960).
19. Geoffrey Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814* (New Haven: New Haven University Press, 1964), p.17.
20. Hartman, p. 218.
21. Harold Bloom, "The Internalization of Quest Romance" in Harold Bloom (ed.) *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism* (New York: Norton, 1970), p. 10.
22. Harold Bloom famously claims in his theory of *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973) that poets were fraught by the influence upon their work of predecessors and compares this psychoanalytically to the influence of the father on the child. Bloom argued that poets attempt to distort the influence of predecessors in their work, but cannot help embodying elements of their predecessors in their work. He includes Wordsworth in his theory, in reaction to his "father-figure" John Milton.
23. Marlon B. Ross, "Romantic Quest and Conquest: Troping Masculine Power in the Crisis of Poetic Identity" in Ann K. Mellor (ed.) *Romanticism and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 27.

24. Ann K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 149.
25. The philosophical treatment I give here is only one possible reading of this poem, designed to show the poem as an instance of a deeper philosophical discourse. For more recent historicist work which brings in political aspects, and particularly the pertinence of the French Revolution, see David Bromwich, "The French Revolution and Tintern Abbey," *Raritan* 10:3, (1991, Winter): pp. 1-23. For a much discussed historicist reading of displacements in the poem see Marjorie Levinson, "Insight and Oversight: Reading 'Tintern Abbey'," *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems: Four Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 14-57.
26. For more excellent discussion of the plethora of connections to Milton's *Paradise Lost* and the biblical book of *Revelation* see Abrams' *Natural Supernaturalism*, especially pp. 19-56. For example on p. 24 Abrams discusses Wordsworth's journey self-consciously running deeper than Milton's descent into "Chaos and eternal night" and then, "Up led by thee," to have ascended "Into the Heav'n of Heav'ns...and drawn Empyrean Air" (III, 13-21; VII, 12-14). The cosmos of Wordsworth's poem, however, is of a larger extension, and requires an imaginative journey that must descend deeper and rise higher than Milton's flight."
27. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, p 56.
28. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, p. 56.
29. Jarvis, p. 3.
30. Structuralist linguist and critic Roman Jakobson famously delineated two axes of language based upon studies of children with the speech defect aphasia. See the essay "The Metaphoric and the Metonymic Poles" in David Lodge (ed.) *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader* (London: Longman, 1988), pp. 57-61. Jakobson argues that literary language functions on one of two poles, either metaphoric or metonymic, (or paradigmatic and syntagmatic). The metaphoric pole comes from the *selection* of a linguistic figure from other possible sets, whereas the metonymic (which includes synechdoche) comes from the *combination* axis of language. Jakobson claims that certain genres (or sub-genres) such as realist novels and stories make more use of the metonymic axis, which requires contextual cues to function and builds up a contiguous picture, whereas styles such as symbolism and romantic poetry rely more heavily on the metaphoric mode. Whilst I broadly agree with this assessment, I believe that these two axes are crossed in Wordsworth in order to produce a higher aesthetic result from their synthesis. Another example of this combination of the two poles would be that of certain modernisms, especially that of Joyce. For example in the short story "Araby" (1914) Joyce combines the combination axes for a realist effect and the selection axis for the effect of romance. Joyce therefore successfully combines the discourse of romance in the protagonist's mind with the discourse of realism as a narrative frame within which this is set. In applying this to Wordsworth we get on the one hand a sense of a realist travelogue, and on the other a highly symbolic modality whereby the rhetorical figures also partake in the infinite universe, and become in a sense, *organic* due to their partaking as objects, in the universe.
31. Paul de Man, "The Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image" in Harold Bloom (ed.) *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism*, p. 70.

32. de Man, p. 73.
33. Lindenberger, p. 154.
34. David Perkins, *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Sincerity* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964), pp. 92-93.
35. Hartman, p. 218. Hartman claims of the abyssal vision in Wordsworth: "Though the vision appears to be generated by the elements themselves—being a gift of nature, or, more miraculously still, of the autonomous imagination blending with nature—the abyssal vision has a history going from well-known biblical sources (Genesis and Psalms) through Virgil, Boehme, Thomas Burnet and other metaphysician-travellers of the profound." Of course this is only an assumption on Hartman's part, but just because the abyssal vision may be traceable back to other "metaphysician travellers of the profound," this does certainly not mean that the imagination for Wordsworth is not "blending with nature." My own argument runs that the natural world is "interiorised" by the poet and re-presented in this way from the perspective of a *concrete universal*. For Hartman, due to his refusal, like Bloom, to grant Wordsworth's poetry a "blending" of nature and the imagination, this is not a viable option.

Chapter Four

Dialectical Collapse and Post-Romantic Recognition in Shelley

1. Introduction

Shelley's poetry reflects various philosophical ideas that shaped his thought from his years at Oxford through to his years on the Continent. An early influence, for example, was William Godwin, in particular his teleology of perfectibility that encourages a rationalistic approach to history and helped Shelley formulate his youthful political hopes and aspirations in a clearly defined political discourse. Godwin's gradualism—his commitment to slow realisation of progressive ideals over time—was unattractive to Shelley, who thought the model inimical to the hopes of imminent change and political practice in England in the immediate aftermath of the French revolution¹. Furthermore, Shelley's early infatuation with the materialism of Baron d' Holbach² complicated his engagement with Godwin's rationalism. D' Holbach placed human agency in a naturalistic and deterministic context—whereas Godwin viewed agency as fundamentally rational and free (i.e. as capable of rationally determined choices). A further influence on Shelley was the British empirical tradition, culminating in Humean scepticism, which further called Shelley's faith in metaphysical systems into question. These very different and seemingly irreconcilable philosophical influences led Shelley to develop a position that has been called *sceptical idealism*, whereby Shelley's view of the world is sceptical in the sense of what one *can know*, and ideal in the sense that this knowledge is premised on a Platonic understanding of the universe.³

This merging of idealism and scepticism is manifested in Shelley's conception of the speculative ideal of *The One*—a monistic concept akin to Hegelian *Absolute Spirit*, that can only be understood on a transcendental level (idealism), not directly available in the limited everyday experience of the world (which is characterised by

scepticism).⁴ For Shelley then, this ideal is not available in the form of Wordsworthian pantheism—whereby the universal discloses itself within the poet’s meditative experience of the natural world; and not available in the form of an intellectual intuition of the kind sought by Coleridge—due to its supersensible nature. As a result, Shelley has an uncertain grasp of *The One*. Interestingly, although he lacks a purely intellectual conceptualisation of *The One*, his scepticism with respect to the world of appearances (that appearances deceive and cannot guide us securely towards certainty) saves the day because he views appearances as *possibly* representing the supersensible realm of *The One*. Appearances are uncertain but not false, so it is possible through them to attain *The One* if only a way can be found. This almost Platonic faith, though varied in strength at different points in his poetic career, characterises his work. This feature orients his work towards the search for some unseen or unattainable truth—or as the Demagorgon states in *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) “the deep truth is imageless.”⁵ In attempting to resolve this impasse, Shelley attempted to go *beyond* the speculative unification of the Wordsworthian organic conception of the universe—and work towards an ultimately unattainable *transcendental signified*. This is a signified that exists in a space outside of the empirical world—and ultimately outside of our symbolic realm of signification.

In what follows I seek to show that by the time of Shelley’s final and unfinished poem “The Triumph of Life,” (1822) he comes to realise the failure of his attempt to secure a visionary recognition of *The Absolute*, or *The One*, as he calls his ideal. I will start by examining the poem “Mont Blanc” (1816). I argue that the tensions within the poem are manifested by Shelley’s inability to create a *metaphysical equipoise*—whereas Wordsworth achieves an *organic* sense of equipoise—

reconciling his mind with the apparent alterity of the external world. Where Wordsworth finds an “adequation suitable to the idea” in the landscape, Shelley’s poetry becomes gradually more *disembodied*. This is due to Shelley’s centrifugal will-to-transcend the world of materialism—to go beyond Wordsworth’s organic *aesthesis* and to find a space of spiritual and autonomous vision. I will also consider two other poems that exemplify the tensions in Shelley’s idealism, “Alastor” (1816) and “Adonais.” (1821). The first poem expresses Shelley’s acknowledgement of the profound impossibility of his visionary search for *The One*. Shelley realises early in his poetic career that the visionary poet’s romantic ideal of a transcendent *aesthetic aesthesis* is impossible within the horizon of the empirical world. The second explores an eschatological solution to this aporia. I will finish with an analysis of “The Triumph of Life,” (1822) where I argue he has finally reached a stage where his dialectical struggle *collapses* and he realises that the visionary ideal of *The One* is unattainable whilst we dwell within the sublunary sphere.

2. Shelley’s quest for the imagination upon Mont Blanc

Shelley most clearly demonstrates the divided nature of his early state of mind in the poem “Mont Blanc.” By “state of mind” I mean the tension Shelley felt between his former necessarian ideas and his sceptical idealism on the one hand and his (now strained) Godwinian ideal of an infinitely perfectible human intellect and imagination on the other; the Platonic writings that Shelley was also reading and translating at this time compounded the difficulties he found in finding a secure footing in which to situate his philosophical beliefs. The experience of Mont Blanc acts in an allegorical sense for Shelley’s quest for a pure *aesthetic aesthesis*. In fact, upon reading the poem one cannot fail to notice the similarities between Shelley’s poem and the treatment of the problematical autonomous imagination adumbrated

by Coleridge in “Kubla Khan.” Where Coleridge wrote of subterranean “caverns measureless to man” (4) Shelley writes: “caverns echoing to the Arves’s commotion,” (30) and “the still cave of the witch Poesy,” (44). He also strikingly writes: “...vast caves/ Shine in the rushing torrents’ restless gleam,/ Which from those secret chasms in tumult welling” (120-122); Coleridge writes: “And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething” (17). The river which runs down to a “sunless sea” (5) in “Kubla Khan” is echoed in Shelley as the central trope of “Mont Blanc”: the streams of human thought which are the receivers of the main source of hidden “Power” crashing through the ravine, symbolised by the Arve:

...where from *secret springs*
 The source of human thought its tribute brings
 Of waters,—with a sound but half its own,
 Such as a feeble brook will oft assume (4-7) (*my italics*).

The mysterious and illusive nature of the source of the imagination is further symbolised by the troping of unseen powerful heights upon the mountain itself, through the use of imagery such as ice and the sun. These imagistic devices which for Coleridge act as textual *reconciling* opposites that represent the workings of the *primary imagination*, in contrast act for Shelley as *antagonists* towards the realm of mortal power and illustrate a marked indifference to human thought:

Power dwells apart in its tranquillity
 Remote, serene, and inaccessible:
 And *this*, the naked countenance of earth,
 On which I gaze, even these primeval mountains
 Teach the adverting mind...

 Frost and the Sun in scorn of mortal power
 Have piled: dome, pyramid, and pinnacle,
 A city of death, distinct with many a tower
 And wall impregnable of beaming ice.
 Yet not a city, but a flood of ruin
 Is there, that from the boundaries of the sky
 Rolls its perpetual stream;... (96-100, 103-109)

The comparison with “Kubla Khan” is striking; more striking perhaps is the idea that in Shelley these images, which allegorically represented the workings of the *primary* romantic imagination in Coleridge, have been transposed, or drained completely of their original imaginative essence. The immutable power “dwells apart”; and is “inaccessible” and this is part of the Shelleyan experience of the sublime. Moreover, the images of “Frost and the Sun” are “in scorn of mortal power” because of the physical detritus resulting from their geographical processes and the immutability of this process.

Another major difference in uses of imagery between the two poets is that the “city” itself is created not by the imagination but by the natural elements, and though Coleridge’s garden was a *hortus conclusus*, Shelley’s is a bleak and barren landscape, seemingly devoid of any imaginative hope. In Coleridge’s poem the narrator sets the “Stately pleasure dome” against the forces of history and creates a tension between the autonomous imagination and the *natura naturans*; in Shelley the power of the *natura naturans* is ubiquitous and yet it appears to work in an antagonistic fashion towards “mortal power.” For Harold Bloom, this un- Wordsworthian conception of nature is at the heart of Shelley’s creativity in “Mont Blanc”:

The head, in “Mont Blanc,” learns, like Blake, that there is no natural religion. There is a Power, a secret strength of things, but it hides its true shape or its shapelessness behind or beneath a dread mountain, and it shows itself only as an indifference, or even pragmatically a malevolence, towards the well-being of men.⁶

This is a sublime encounter, but unlike the Kantian experience of the sublime, which acts to inspire the creative imagination by recognising its own limits, or “cannot be contained in any sensuous form, but rather concerns ideas of reason, which, although no adequate presentation of them is possible, may be aroused and called to

mind by that very inadequacy itself which does admit of sensuous presentation,”⁷ the sublime experience is here clearly presented in a self-contained, sensuous form. This Shelleyan experience is one that promotes the immutability of the natural world in relation to the romantic imagination. Shelley’s conceptualisation of the sublime therefore lies closer to an empirical conception such as Burke’s than to Kant’s transcendental conception. The power lies not in the workings of reason but in the empirical world itself.

The reason for Shelley’s empirical conception of the sublime is likely to lie in the influence of French *materialism* and necessarian doctrines which, though Shelley himself proclaimed to have dispelled them in his essay “On Life” (1815),⁸ clearly still influenced his overall philosophical and poetical framework. However, in the poem Shelley also hints at the potential power of the imagination as an epiphenomenon of the power of the Arve. Shelley apostrophises:

Dizzy Ravine! And when I gaze on thee
I seem as in a trance sublime and strange
To muse on my own separate phantasy,
My own, my human mind, which passively
Now renders and receives fast influencings,
Holding an unremitting interchange
With the clear universe of things around; (34-40)

Shelley admits an influence “seems” to act upon his mind, akin to that as upon Wordsworth in “Tintern Abbey” and it sends the poet into a kind of “trance sublime.” The repetition of “my own,” “My own, my human mind” sets the tone in an almost equally antagonistic stance towards the external world. The repetition of the possessive pronoun emphasises Shelley’s own agency in this dramatisation of the dialectic between the intelligible and the sensuous realms. This perhaps points to the fact that Shelley at certain junctures in the poem does actually entertain the possibility of a more Kantian experience of the sublime, centred in his own

awakened imagination. The *reality* is that Shelley is expressing the experience of a dialectical aporia, which remains unresolved, or more precisely non-progressive, within the space of the poem. The injunction “I seem” further adds to the ambiguity of Shelley’s actual experience within the valley, whereas Wordsworth is of course much more affirmative about the transcendental nature of these experiences. The phrase “unremitting interchange” however points towards a more Wordsworthian sense of a positive dialectic between the mind and nature. Shelley further references the powers of the imagination in the next lines of the poem:

One legion of wild thoughts, whose wandering wings
Now float above thy darkness, and now rest
Where that or thou art no unbidden guest,
In the still cave of the witch Poesy,
Seeking among the shadows that pass by,
Ghosts of all things that are, some shade of thee,
Some phantom, some faint image; till the breast
From which they fled recalls them, thou art there! (41-47)

These lines most clearly exhibit the uncertainty raging in Shelley’s rubric of Romanticism at this point in his career. The “cave of the witch Poesy” we can read on the one hand as alluding to Plato’s metaphor of the cave.⁹ The “legion of wild thoughts” are given an autonomous gloss in that they “float above” the darkness of the ravine, but the thoughts themselves rest *within* the Platonic cave. This illustrates the confusion in Shelley’s epistemology between, on the one hand the sense that the thoughts of the imagination *govern* all perception, *precede* and transcend the “darkness” of the exterior world and that on the other, they inhabit the space of the Platonic cave and therefore remain in a secondary state of being in a dualistic *Ousia*. Furthermore, the indication that these “thoughts” seek “among the shadows that pass by” some “shade of thee” (the darkness and the valley itself), illustrates a reversal of the first figure in which they “floated above” the darkness of the ravine: now they seek amongst dark interior shadows “some shade of thee” the *true* nature of the

Arve. Additionally, the sensuous sound patterns of the ravine itself that echo “the Arve’s commotion” (30) are superseded by the intelligible pattern of the mind receiving reflections of shadows of the Arve, as symbol of a transcendent power. In short, Shelley moves from physical description, analogically, to a description of the interior mind, as does Wordsworth in “Tintern Abbey.” The difference for Shelley is that where Wordsworth gains a sense of equipoise through problematising the boundaries between the inner and the outer, Shelley switches his ontology between a transcendental idealism and a psychophysical parallelism whereby the mind is an “echo” or epiphenomenon of the exterior universe. The lines “till the breast/ from which they fled recalls them, thou art there!” adds to the ambiguity of Shelley’s ontology, because these lines seem to imply an *absolute idealism* in that the valley is itself lodged as pure representation in his own imagination. These idealistic lines can be read in terms of Shelley using the analogy of the outer landscape—the invisible heights of the mountain, which cast the powerful river downwards—to represent his own imagination, casting out thoughts.

In the third section of the poem Shelley spells out his divided ontological position in the clearest terms, after describing the possible geographical processes that went into the production of the ravine he claims:

The wilderness has a mysterious tongue
Which teaches awful doubt, or faith so mild,
So solemn, so serene, that man may be
But for such faith with nature reconciled. (76-79)

Thus for Shelley one can either retain a Wordsworthian pantheism that culminates in his organicist ontology, or the “awful doubt” which can be attributed to Coleridge’s dualistic ontology and the unhappy consciousness as expressed in poems such as “Dejection” and “Constancy.” The use of antithesis indicates the starkness of the mystery to which the romantic poets commit themselves. Interestingly, whereas

Wordsworth in “Tintern Abbey” proceeds from contemplation of the natural scene before interiorising the trope and disembodiment the imagery, to the point where we “become a living soul”(47), Shelley keeps up constant reference to the wilderness, and the *over-riding* power of the external world, signifying the influence of necessarian doctrines and materialism. At the commencement of part 5 Shelley proclaims: “Mont Blanc yet gleams on high: the Power is there” (127), commencing the crescendo of the poem with a positive affirmation of the power of nature. He thus appears to have settled on a perspective whereby the “Power” resides in empirical nature, and not within the imaginative realm. However his final, famously ambiguous lines, conclude with the apostrophe:

And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea,
If to the human mind’s imaginings
Silence and solitude were vacancy? (142-144)

The question is ambiguous, and can be read in two ways. The lines can firstly be read as Shelley’s implication that the power of the Shelleyan sublime is negated by virtue of the fact that *without* the power of the imagination the external world is a vacancy. This reading implies that even though there is a power that emanates from the external and beautiful forms of nature, this power can only be activated by “unremitting interchange” with the human imagination. This is a more Wordsworthian reading of the conclusion. In contrast, one may also read the final lines as claiming that the silence and solitude of Mont Blanc *could* be pure vacancy, giving a sense once again of materialism, or *natura naturata*, without any hidden power—in other words the idea that the landscape is unresponsive to the poet’s imaginative wanderings. This correlates with the sense of “awful doubt” alluded to earlier in the poem. This second reading points to the idea that the poet may have hypostatized a false ontology, and therefore removes the possibility of any idealism,

whether transcendental or psychological. Shelley cannot resist but plunge the reader back into the antithetical tone that has permeated the whole of the poem, whereby the poet remains undecided on the two alternatives, without the positive *metaphysical equipoise* achieved by Wordsworth. (Wordsworth further hypostatizes a state of recognition between himself and his sister, via the *medium* of the natural landscape, something further not available to Shelley).

I.J. Kapstein reads the final lines of the poem in the sense of a slave (the poet's imagination) responding to his master (the sublime wilderness), in defiance; a reading that further adds to the dialectical, and unresolved, nature of the poem:

Indeed the tone of the lines gives the only consistency to their ambiguity. For in whatever sense they are read Shelley seems to be asserting the ironic attitude of a slave towards his master. The slave, admitting his master's power over him, yet resentful that he is a slave, consoles himself by saying that if it were not for his existence as a slave his master's power would have no significance. Or again, the slave in self-consolation says that his master's power rises from the labor of the slave which converts the raw materials supplied by the master into objects of value.¹⁰

The Hegelian connotations are clear: the master slave dialectic is displaced into the relationship between Shelley's imagination and the external world and the implicit need for a form of recognition, or an *I-Thou* relationship. The essential importance of this reading is that it shows that the poet finds himself in a distinctly un- Wordsworthian relationship with the natural world. The metre and the subject matter of the poem are often Wordsworthian, but the antithetical tone and the inherent ambiguities in the poem illustrate the fact that Shelley is enslaved within a non-progressive dialectic between the imagination and the natural world. At the closure of the poem we have a situation far from equipoise, and certainly not of unity. In the corpus of British romantic poetry, this was to be the beginning of the end of the Wordsworthian conception of the natural world. Shelley had demarcated a state

whereby the enquiring imagination, looking *beyond* the natural world as envisaged by Wordsworth, was to attempt a transcendence of *Spirit* (or imagination). This transcendence could not be accommodated through a dialogical interchange between the mind and the natural world. Shelley's slave in effect attempts to overthrow the master, and in so doing attempts a revolution of the imagination. Consequently, Shelley unconsciously returns the subject to a state of *deworlde*d *subjectivity*, or alienation from the natural world.

Shelley's sense of alienation from nature is further illustrated by his attitude in letters written whilst composing "Mont Blanc." This vacillates between an acknowledgment of Buffon's biogeography as outlined in *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière* (1749–1788) and a more mystical but nevertheless nihilistic dualism of the Indian mythology of Orozmazes and Ahrimanes: the spirit of warmth versus the spirit of darkness, cold and death, as symbolized by Mont Blanc itself. Shelley wrote in a letter to his friend T.L. Peacock, who had already used the esoteric doctrine of Orozmazes and Ahrimanes in his earlier poetry:

I will not pursue Buffon's sublime but gloomy theory, that this earth which we inhabit will at some future period be changed into a mass of frost. Do you who assert the supremacy of Ahriman imagine him throned among these desolating snows, among these palaces of death and frost, sculptured in this their terrible magnificence by the unsparing hand of necessity, & that he casts around him as the first essays of his final usurpation avalanches, torrents, rocks & thunders—and above all, these deadly glaciers at once the proofs and symbols of his reign [sic].¹¹

On two levels therefore Shelley asserts an alienating and nihilistic doctrine of nature, one scientific and the other mystical. Shelley's own atheism it is interesting to note, only adds to his sense of alienation. Even for Coleridge, Christianity remained something through which he could rescue his faith in nature, and he used the doctrine of the theodicy of the landscape not only in "Frost at Midnight" but also

in his own poem, which was set (although not written) in the Vale of Chaumony, “Chaumony; the Hour Before Sunrise. A Hymn”(1802).¹² Coleridge’s Unitarian theosophy (at times, not always) helped save him from the form of doubt that Shelley, the atheist, was prone to. This is one of the reasons for Shelley’s intellectual philosophy and for his ontological aporia, played out in his imaginary envisioning of Mont Blanc. Christian thinkers such as Coleridge and Wordsworth ultimately had the back up of their religious convictions to bolster *a fortiori* their metaphysical commitments; this was not available to Shelley.

3. Visionary alienation in “Alastor”

“Alastor; or, *The Spirit of Solitude*” (1816) was actually written before “Mont Blanc” but dramatises the inner tension that the poet felt between his visionary yearnings and the external world. The title itself is riddled with ambiguity: the original Greek term means *evil genius*.¹³ It would appear therefore that the visionary poet, who rejects society and nature in favour of his own visions is pursued by an evil spirit, which stems from the spirit of solitude. I believe this points to Shelley’s sense of uncertainty with regards to the moral dimension of his visions, and his ambiguous epistemic standpoint with regards to the natural world. The title could also be ironic, in that many of Wordsworth’s former works often dealt with solitude, and that having recently read *The Excursion* (1814) both Percy and Mary were disappointed with Wordsworth’s later work, which they classed as traitorous to his earlier radicalism.¹⁴ Moreover, the opening quote of the poem is lifted from *The Excursion*, although it has been argued that this is also an ironic reference to Wordsworth’s perceived apostasy by Shelley, and that the framing device is a *pastiche* of the original Wordsworthian position. Earl Wasserman claims:

The framing structure of the two narratives is the same: in place of Wordsworth's Wanderer, a disciple of nature who tells Margaret's story and laments her early death, there is Shelley's Narrator, who tells of the Visionary and might well subscribe to Wordsworth's claim that the external world and the individual mind are exquisitely "fitted" to each other. [...] To Shelley, Wordsworth has not set his sights high enough and has defined man's spirit too mundanely, too humanly: the truly good who are soonest taken out of life are not those with unwavering and devoted hope for, and faith in, an absent human love, but those who aspire to a vision that is absent because it can have no existence on earth.¹⁵

This reading of the framing device is key to the dialectical situation Shelley finds himself in. In effect, Shelley is trying to go beyond the Wordsworthian sense of *metaphysical equipoise* to new visionary heights. Therefore, in "Alastor," he displaces the Wordsworthian motif into a visionary character, who attempts to go further and attempts to delve beyond the secrets of nature and in so doing to move *centrifugally* beyond the natural world as representation of the infinite. Wasserman further claims of the design of the poem:

...the Visionary seeks an Absolute which will match his mind's perfect conceptions and ideals and, to use the language of "Oh! there are spirits," [a poem supposedly dedicated to Coleridge] alone can answer his demands. Unlike the Narrator, who can boast that the creations of his nature are his "kindred" (15), the Visionary, moulded by his own visions, by nature's best impulses, and by the true, good, and beautiful that philosophers have taught, early left his "alienated home" (76), an exile without kindred but filled with an insatiable need for some essence with which he can identify himself.¹⁶

The alienated home, upon a Hegelian reading, is also a symbol for the "station along the way" at which Wordsworth finds himself in his organicist conception. Shelley is attempting to manoeuvre to a position beyond this, and in so doing has become dialectically alienated from his literal home *and* his home in the world. For Shelley there is no sense of *Gefühl*, and no sense of discovering a home embodied for example in the Vale of Grasmere. Importantly, he has not *lost* his spiritual and literal home as has Coleridge, but has *chosen* to exile himself. His is a movement

through the veil of the natural world. His “insatiable need for some essence with which he can identify himself” is the late-romantic urge towards some *telos*, which is not pantheistically experienced through the medium of the natural world. Shelley’s poetry as such becomes in a sense *disembodied*, as he simply will not be able to experience the higher visions within the realm of the corporeal. This theme of an even higher, or as I have labelled it, *centrifugal* quest, Bloom correctly claims is in the lineage of Wordsworth and Coleridge. Bloom however fails to couch his argument in Hegelian terms, which pinpoints the precise nature of the movement between the three poets.

Such a theme [an infinite *Sehnsucht* in the form of a quest leading to the poet’s untimely death] would not have been acceptable to Wordsworth or Coleridge, and yet it is the legitimate offspring of their own art and imaginative theory. Indeed, *Alastor* is prompted by *The Excursion*, and echoes both the *Intimations Ode* and *Kubla Khan*.¹⁷

Shelley is trying to attain a transcendence of Wordsworthian organicism, which for his metaphysics falls short of *The One*, or *Absolute*, and in so doing he attempts to supersede the position of his two exemplars.¹⁸

For Shelley then, there is a divide here between on the one hand the narrator’s Wordsworthian reconciliation with nature, and on the other the visionary’s attempt to move dialectically beyond this position. This is a dichotomy examined in other poems by Shelley, such as the “Song of Pan” and “Song of Apollo” (1820).¹⁹ Shelley then explores a form of the Hegelian unhappy consciousness, where the ideal form has returned dialectically into itself, after seeking some form of recognition in the experience of the natural world. In centrifugally moving away from an embodied representation of itself, (embodied in the natural landscape) it seeks a new adequation *beyond* nature. In Hegel’s words it can no longer “toil itself” into the form of a concrete figuration. Rather than attempting to toil itself into the

empirical world, the idea is attempting to transcend the world as represented by nature in the work of art. For Hegel philosophy takes over; for Shelley, aesthetics is the vehicle for this adequation of the *Absolute/One*.

The poem commences with a sense of a yearning in the opening invocation to the “Great Parent” (45) by the main narrator, who, in love with nature, has “cherished these my kindred...” (15). However, there is an eschatological bent in the gothic imagery that the narrator invokes, as he continues:

And my heart ever gazes on the depth
Of thy deep mysteries. I have made my bed
In charnels and on coffins, where black death
Keeps record of the trophies won from thee,
Hoping to still these obstinate questionings (22-26)

Shelley’s narrator, whilst loving the natural world for what existentially is, has still questionings that lead beyond the mortal world. Whilst he is projected by Shelley as the archetypal Wordsworthian poet of nature, he also provides us with the narrative of Shelley’s alter ego: the visionary, who has taken the next dialectical step in attempting to realise his *ideal* vision. Once the framing device is in place with the narrative of the visionary wanderer, we find that he visits “The awful ruins of the days of old” (108)²⁰ in order to seek timeless truths. Later, the narrator claims that “...he saw/ The thrilling secrets of the birth of time.” (127-8) in the temple of *Denderah* in upper Egypt. This encounter suggests that ultimate truths are discerned by and exhibited in man’s representation of the universe in his aesthetic products. Shelley is self-consciously attempting to go beyond nature as representation of the infinite, and finding, in the same way as Hegel, higher truths represented in aesthetics rather than in the contemplation of raw nature. These are truths which are embodied, and in a Hegelian sense, at the primitive and *symbolic* stage of representation; they are still however higher approximations of the *concrete*

universal than contemplation of nature. In the next lines of the poem the narrator moves beyond this concretised representation to his attempt at a higher, more spiritual *Gestalt*. This process is metaphorically figured with the appearance of the Arab maiden, who attempts, but fails, to wake the visionary from his reverie and enfold him in sensuous, corporeal love. Finally however, she returns to her “cold home/ Wildered, and wan, and panting, she returned.” (138-9). At this point the visionary has witnessed (what are for him) the highest, and still imperfect representations of *The One*, and has rejected (perhaps unknowingly) the advances of the beautiful Arab maiden. This marks the section of the poem after which the visionary can find no embodiment for his vision, and the true *hamartia* of his quest begins to take hold.

The poet next dreams of the “veiled maid” (151), an idealised vision, which as in “Kubla Khan,” is available to the dreamer’s reverie, but once awakened the vision has gone. This is an autoerotic vision, and the poet is in fact projecting his own ideal-other in the guise of the dream-figure. In some of the most erotic lines in Shelley we are informed:

...He reared his shuddering limbs and quelled
His gasping breath, and spread his arms to meet
Her panting bosom:... she drew back a while,
Then, yielding to the irresistible joy,
With frantic gesture and short breathless cry
Folded his frame in her dissolving arms.
Now blackness veiled his dizzy eyes, and night
Involved and swallowed up the vision; sleep,
Like a dark flood suspended in its course,
Rolled back its impulse on his vacant brain. (182-191)

Shelley uses a series of erotically-charged verbs and participles to invoke the erotic frenzy of the visionary, “shuddering” “gasping” and “panting,” and describes the scene in equally erotic adjectival phrases, “the irresistible joy” and “short breathless cry.” However, Shelley depicts an awareness of the overall illusory effect of the

imagery by using simple pentameter in uniform with the rest of the poem and therefore restraining the passionate content within a regular rhythm. On line 190, sleep “Like a dark flood suspended in its course,” once again clears the mind—sleep signifies the *reality principle*, which makes his brain “vacant” once again. This is the sad truth for the visionary: his brain will in effect remain “vacant” with regards to these illusory visions he pursues. The only *true* reality seems to be his empirical experience. Unfortunately, this does not suffice, and the narrator comments on the visionary’s newfound situation a few lines further on:

...His wan eyes
Gaze on the empty scene as vacantly
As ocean’s moon looks on the moon in heaven.
The spirit of sweet human love has sent
A vision to the sleep of him who spurned
Her choicest gifts. He eagerly pursues
Beyond the realms of dream that fleeting shade;
He overleaps the bounds... (200-207)

The word “vacantly” is repeated and in this context he gazes vacantly because his mind (brain) has become vacant, and as such his empirical experience no longer works in an interchange with his mind. This is because the ideal vision of the maiden has forced him dialectically into the next shape of consciousness—which for Hegel would be disclosure of reason as *Ousia*. For the poetic aesthete however, the mind searches for continued interchange between the mind and the empirical world—in a sense his mental sinews continue to work in the way they are accustomed. Here, as with Coleridge, we have a *punctum* of Shelley’s Romanticism; the realisation of a space beyond the sensuous, however a *noetic* praxis for which the poet is unable to legislate, due to his continued reliance on aesthetics as the final cipher of *The One*.

The only recourse for the poet, at this impasse, is to countenance the conceptualisation of *death*. Therefore, he faces a choice between eschatology and a

life-affirming realisation of *the concrete universal*. Shelley utilises his latent Platonism, and pursues a dualistic solution to his aporia. This leads to a rhetorical question and ensuing aporetic exclamations:

...Alas, alas!
 Were limbs, and breath, and being intertwined
 Thus treacherously? Lost, lost, for ever lost
 In the wide pathless desert of dim sleep,
 That beautiful shape! Does the dark gate of death
 Conduct to thy mysterious paradise,
 O sleep? Does the bright arch of rainbow clouds,
 And pendent mountains seen in the calm lake,
 Lead only to a black and watery depth,
 While death's blue vault, with loathliest vapours hung, (207-216)

Shelley feels the pull of death and the questioning in his, as in Hamlet's, mind. He ponders whether or not after death we re-enter a lost paradise, a Shelleyan paradise stripped of all Christian lore, but holding hope for a return to the ideal visions visited upon him in mortal sleep. He cannot embrace death in life and therefore death remains an abstract entity for the poet—and *this factor functions as an adjunct to his overall poetic enterprise*. Thus, Shelley remains in the state of the unhappy consciousness, and this unhappy consciousness will act antithetically within the framework of the poem: the poet will be haunted by the visions for which he once sought in vain. This is due to the failure on the part of the visionary to take the next dialectical step of absorbing death into the overall Hegelian *Idea*. Maurice Merleau-Ponty sums up the Hegelian movement of recognition of death in the conceptualisation of *the concrete universal* thus:

Death is the negation of all particular given beings, and consciousness of death is a synonym for consciousness of the universal, but it is only an empty or abstract universal as long as we remain at this point. We cannot in fact conceive nothingness except against a background of being (or, as Sartre says, against the world). Therefore, any notion of death which claims to hold our attention is deceiving us, since it is in fact surreptitiously using our consciousness of being. To plumb our awareness of death, we must

transmute it into life, “interiorize” it, as Hegel said. The abstract universal which starts out opposed to life must be made concrete.²¹

Shelley misses out on the crucial philosophical point here—that the “abstract universal which starts out opposed to life must be made concrete.” Wordsworth in effect absorbs the abstract *concepts* of nature and death into his organic conception and therefore formulates a partial conception of *the concrete universal* through his aesthetics. Shelley goes *beyond* the abstract conceptualisation of nature to a vision rooted in the realm of the ideal. However, this movement does not entail the absorption of Nature into the overall *Idea*—it remains an abstract universal to Shelley. His only option to move to the next dialectical stage is to embrace death as part of *the concrete universal*—but instead death also remains for Shelley at the stage of *abstract universal*, and therefore he remains dialectically ‘lodged’ and unable to move to a new space or *Gestalt*. Henceforward, Shelley becomes for the rest of “Alastor” pursued by his own visions, or his own ironical demon. In fact, from a critical perspective, this is possibly the reason why the poem itself becomes at times repetitive and at times gratuitous, in the next 500 lines or so. For the remainder of the poem Shelley describes the visionary’s unhappy wanderings in nature, which eventually lead him to his own death.

The source of the imagination is interrogated using the symbol of a river—and again, as in Wordsworth and Coleridge, there is no definitive answer for the poet.²² Indeed, the search turns out to be one for death itself, which though not intellectually embraced and subsumed within the Hegelian *Idea*, can at least be *literally* embraced:

The meeting boughs and implicated leaves
Wove twilight o’er the Poet’s path, as led
By love, or dream, or god, or mightier Death,
He sought in Nature’s dearest haunt, some bank,
Her cradle, and his sepulchre... (426-430)

After originally attempting to transcend nature, Shelley is now led by nature, but at the same time alienated by nature. What is nature's "cradle" is antithetically the poet's "sepulchre." Wordsworth, in accepting nature as his mother, and the cradle of his psychology and imagination, reconciles himself to its otherwise abstract presence. In so doing, Wordsworth manages to transcend the romantic *deworlde*d *subjectivity* he finds himself in at points in *The Prelude*. However, for Shelley, nature's cradle becomes a *grave* for the alienated consciousness that has failed to absorb the ideal of *the concrete universal*. This image also implies that Shelley wishes to return to the source of life itself, but that this source can only be apprehended—if at all—in death. The narcissistic archetype that is explored in the poem is also reversed later when the poet catches a glimpse of himself in the pool, within the cavern:

Hither the Poet came. His eyes beheld
 Their own wan light through the reflected lines
 Of his thin hair, distinct in the dark depth
 Of that still fountain; as the human heart,
 Gazing in dreams over the gloomy grave,
 Sees its own treacherous likeness there... (469-474)

The poet sees an aged and wretched version of his formerly beautiful visage, a visage that has now become distorted by its own solitary search for an ideal reflection of itself in the natural world. For Shelley, there is no form of recognition between the poet and the external world, and additionally no recognition *beyond* the immanent world of reality. The figure of the human heart glimpsing itself in "dreams over the gloomy grave" reinforces this point. But more than this, even in death, or in visions of death in dreams, the poet has little hope of any kind of recognitive knowledge; death's likeness to the human is "treacherous." The poet is therefore alienated both in the world of empirical experience and eschatologically, as he finds no speculative recompense even in the possibility of a life after death.

Later, the poet actually discovers the source of all thought and conceptualisation is indeed rooted within his own unhappy and divided consciousness. This, however, means that the poet gains no sense of recognition in anything exterior, and in going further into the subterranean cave he has entered he is in fact going further back into his *own* mind. He has discovered a solipsism for which therefore all speculations upon the natural world and death are introspective self-reflections, meaning that the poet has in fact embarked upon an inward path rather than on an outward spiritual search:

“O stream!
Whose source is inaccessibly profound,
Whither do thy mysterious waters tend?
Thou imagest my life. Thy darksome stillness,
Thy dazzling waves, thy loud and hollow gulphs,
Thy searchless fountain and invisible course
Have each their type in me:... (502-508)

Shelley uses the symbol of the stream to represent his own *mental* excursion rather than any physical excursion into exterior space. The main reason for this is that Shelley has countenanced the physical world, and has been unable to formulate a recognitive relationship between his imagination and the alterity of the world. The poet's consciousness turns back into itself, after its dialectical failure in establishing a higher *Gestalt* based upon interaction with the external world. Just as Wordsworth cannot determine any epistemological foundation for his poetics and experience in *The Prelude* “Who that shall point as with a wand, and say/ ‘This portion of the river of my mind/ Came from yon mountain?’” (1799, II, 247-49), so Shelley finds the river runs in an allegorical sense to his own mind. However, this is only due to the unhappy consciousness that the poet now falls prey to, and the fact that after dialectical breakdown everything becomes *negatively* interiorised for the poet. This allegory functions negatively because the poet has not interiorised nature as part of

the overall *Idea*, but instead has actually abstracted nature as an external allegorical correlative for the wanderings of his *nous*.

At the end of the poem, the poet begins to depict nature in a darker tone, more akin to the tone of “Mont Blanc.” Whilst one reading could be of the *egotistical sublime*, or the *pathetic fallacy*, I feel that the main point of this section, as in “Mont Blanc,” is concerned with the sublime indifference of nature to the wanderings and idealisms of the poet’s mind. After the poet has reached this point of self-imposed alienation, he senses, at his actual death, the sublime majesty and immutability of the external world. For example Shelley writes:

...On every side now rose
Rocks, which, in unimaginable forms,
Lifted their black and barren pinnacles
In the light of evening, and its precipice
Obscuring the ravine, disclosed above,
Mid toppling stones, black gulphs and yawning caves,
Whose windings gave ten thousand various tongues
To the loud stream... (543-550)

Here the natural world once again exhibits the indifferent characteristics of the Shelleyan sublime as outlined in “Mont Blanc.” At the end of “Mont Blanc” Shelley posed a question regarding the relationship between the mind and the sublime universe; at the end of “Alastor” Shelley does not even need to pose this question—his intercourse with the natural world has broken down and so he has migrated into his own psyche. The visions, which have “their voice in me” are all that remains for a poet dislocated from the natural landscape. In interiorising his visions, the poet remains eternally at one remove from the sublime world, and the only interaction that takes place is between the sublime caves and the loud stream, which has carried the poet to his mortal death. This sublime scene indeed teaches the poet “awful doubt” as opposed to a Wordsworthian “faith so mild.” If Shelley loses his last

vestige of hope in death in “Alastor”, he regains faith in the afterlife by the final year of his own life, by the time he has composed the elegy, “Adonais.”

4. Eschatological projection in “Adonais.”

In “Adonais” Shelley attempts to formulate an anagogical solution to his dialectical impasse and state of unhappy consciousness. Because Shelley’s hopes of reconciliation with *The One* are transcendental, and now remain outside the confines of the empirical world, he actually writes a poem whereupon he attempts to construct an eschatology based around Keats’ death. This is constructed in order for him to formulate a connection to the dead poet Keats in the afterlife, and to give rise to his own, transcendental hopes, due to his failure to acquire an *aesthetic recognition* through his abstraction of the natural world in poems such as “Alastor” and “Mont Blanc.”

The large body of the poem takes the form of the traditional funeral elegy,²³ however when it comes to the traditional reconciliation of the poet with fate, Shelley writes an extended section on Keats’ place in the celestial sphere. Shelley’s hopes are projected eschatologically onto Keats in a metaphysical space, as Coleridge’s were projected teleologically onto Hartley and existentially onto Sara. The philosophical implication is that Shelley has also constructed a *compositum* out of available segments of empirical experience (and perhaps his own inner dreams or visions) and therefore treats the external universe as an *abstract universal*. This leads in Hegelian terms to a further incomplete recognitive picture of the universe, which can only take place by virtue of a conceptualisation of the fully *concrete universal*.

Woodman claims that Shelley’s model for “Adonais” is taken from Dante’s poetic model as outlined in the second tractate of the *Convivio*. Dante outlines four

hermeneutical spheres of meaning in the *Convivio*, which are the literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical. However, for Dante, correct functionality at the level of the literal has important consequences for the other hermeneutical spheres, as Woodman claims:

Drawing an analogy from Aristotle's *Physics*, he [Dante] argues that the literal level may be considered as the matter, while the other levels may be considered as the form. Unless the matter is properly set forth, it will be impossible either to impose a form upon it or to interpret its meaning.²⁴

This has important consequences when applied to Shelley's post-Dantean poem. Shelley attempts to separate the literal (or material/empirical) from the transcendental realm "the white radiance of Eternity" (463). However, in so doing he creates a philosophical rupture, or a dualism, whereby the poet can only delve into abstract reasoning without an Aristotelian anchor in the material world. In a sense, Shelley has unconsciously reversed Dante's original model, a model that would be more applicable to a poet who actually anchors his aesthetic in the material world, such as Wordsworth. However, due to his 'Orphic' poetic temperament, Shelley seeks an imaginative autonomy from the literal world, a world which is symbolised by Keats' destruction by the critics.²⁵ Dante's Aristotelian schema renders his work more unified as an aesthetic whole; it is unified in the sense that the literal and anagogical are symbiotically tied together, giving a more unified poetic conception of the universe at large. Dante can see in the figure of the earth an allegorical connection to God's heavenly grace and power, as does Wordsworth through his organic aesthetic. In contrast, Shelley's consciousness will remain unhappy and divided, projecting all of his hopes into a disembodied eschatological sphere. Woodman further claims of Dante:

At the end of the *Paradiso*, therefore, he is not left suspended in an “intense inane”; on the contrary, he is able to return to this world, his sense purified and sanctified, and see in earthly love the emblem of God’s Grace.²⁶

Dante’s gain from this quadruple schema works in opposite fashion to that of Shelley, who actually loses (in an attempt to transcend) the literal level of signification. This movement in Shelley begins to take place in stanza 26, where Urania admits that she is unable to follow Adonais into the transcendental sphere of the heavens as she is chained to the natural world “...my Adonais! I would give/ All that I am to be as thou now art!/ But I am chained to Time, and cannot thence depart!” (232-34). Urania lives on in a dejected state in the sublunary sphere of the cyclical natural world, however she remains “chained to Time” and thus not ultimately free as is Adonais’ spirit in “the white radiance of eternity.”

Shelley further develops his eschatology when he describes Adonais’ metaphysical position relative to people living in the natural sphere:

Peace, peace! He is not dead, he doth not sleep—
He hath awakened from the dream of life—
‘Tis we who, lost in stormy visions, keep
With phantoms an unprofitable strife,
And in mad trance, strike with our spirit’s knife
Invulnerable nothings.—*We* decay
Like corpses in a charnel; fear and grief
Convulse us and consume us day by day,
And cold hopes swarm like worms within our living clay. (343-351)

This paradoxical inversion of life and death perfectly epitomises Shelley’s final ontological solution to the aporetic position of his narrator, implicit in “Mont Blanc” and explicit in “Alastor.” Shelley attains a kind of *infinite absolute negativity* but in the sense that he has negated the finite and particular in favour of the infinite and transcendental, again one aspect of the *Idea*, but not the *whole*. This is in fact a similarly incomplete conception of the *Idea* as that of Solger, discussed in Chapter One. In fact, this conception is even more negative to that of Solger, who, even if he

still clung to *infinite absolute negativity*, still appreciated a conception of the infinite within the finite, as do Dante and Wordsworth. This is also the reason for the fact that Shelley resists the romantic irony of either the *Frühromantiker* or his friend and contemporary Byron, who remained in the same sense of Urania, chained to time, and chained to *infinite absolute negativity*. Although we are “lost in stormy visions” and “strike at invulnerable nothings” in the sublunary sphere, which points towards romantic irony, Shelley develops a binary structure between the transcendental sphere and the sublunary and hypostatizes a violent hierarchy by *privileging* the “white radiance of Eternity.”

Shelley also inverts the Wordsworthian connection to nature, which was organically conceived in the living mind of the visionary poet, and switches his pantheism so that it is the spirit of the dead Keats that is experienced in the natural world. In doing so he self-consciously deflates traditional Christian eschatology, and develops a paganistic conception of *The One* to the point where the poet Keats is heard in all of nature’s music:

He is made one with Nature: there is heard
His voice in all her music, from the moan
Of thunder, to the song of night’s sweet bird;
He is a presence to be felt and known
In darkness and in light, from herb and stone,
Spreading itself where’er that Power may move
Which has withdrawn his being to its own; (370-76)

In this section Shelley makes a reference to “that Power” which is the power that moves Shelley when he experiences the sublime in “Mont Blanc.” Shelley has here formulated an anagogical conception of the formerly mysterious power of Mont Blanc that “dwells apart in its tranquillity” (96). He has not however embodied this “Power” in an earthly aesthetic experience, but has used prosopopeia to figuratively present the “Power” as the spirit of Keats. He has in fact disembodied the power in

presenting it in the guise of a human spirit and the marriage of mind and nature experienced in Wordsworth becomes an *estrangement* in the trope of Shelley as he attempts to move dialectically beyond Wordsworth's visionary scheme. Shelley plays with the fantasy of suicide and disembodiment at the end of the poem when he declares of himself:

The breath whose might I have invoked in song
 Descends on me; my spirit's bark is driven,
 Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng
 Whose sails were never to the tempest given;
 The massy earth and sphered skies are riven!
 I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar:
 Whilst burning through the inmost veil of Heaven,
 The soul of Adonais, like a star,
 Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are. (487-495)

Shelley projects a connection to *The One* by infiltrating the bounds of "the massy earth and sphered skies." His "spirit's bark is driven,/ Far from the shore," the shore symbolising on one hand the earthly sphere, and on the other the *literal level*, to which there will be no Dantean return. A further reversal of *the concrete universal* conception of the *Idea*, which is to recognise value in life by interiorising death takes place here. Death and its eschatological implications are for Shelley used as an anodyne to the vagaries of the earthly sphere, and this alterity is that which ultimately keeps Shelley's aesthetic divided. Life is alienated from death, and death as being-opposed-to life becomes even more abstract to Shelley than to any other romantic poet. The Orphic tendency of Shelley's apocalyptic vision reaches its apotheosis at the end of "Adonais", in Woodman's critique:

Death is the awakening to life, to that ultimate self-knowledge which is the goal of Eros and the purpose of the Orphic purification rites. In his moral defence, Shelley could argue that in his apocalyptic vision he reveals his own "metaphysical anatomy." Within the womb of Urania, which is the womb of time, it takes shape. He is now ready to leave the womb of his "melancholy mother" (20), sever the umbilical cord that attaches him to the mythological vision of Necessity, and find his proper abode in the kingdom of pure mind. Viewed from

within the womb of Urania, the reality of death, which is the awakening to life, cannot be perceived.²⁷

Therefore, any self-knowledge for Shelley *is* gained through death, but not in the Hegelian sense of a *concrete universal* conception of the *Idea*. As Woodman rightly claims, it is only by severing “the umbilical cord” to Urania and the realm of necessity that Shelley realises this eschatological vision. The “white radiance of eternity” is always just beyond the earthly sphere, and is symbolised by Lucifer, the morning star. In a sense this, also in Dantean fashion, is the second circle, something available to Shelley once he shatters the “dome of many-coloured glass” (462) that keeps us in a prismatic trap. Of course, this apocalyptic vision gives no sense whatsoever of an equipoise between the two binary realms of the inner/outer, intelligible/sensible. The precariousness of this vision, which remains un-rooted and unreceptive to the empirical world would ultimately come back to haunt Shelley in his final, unfinished poem, “The Triumph of Life.”

5. Wonder, transfiguration and irony in “The Triumph of Life”

By the time Shelley was composing his final poem, it appeared that *sceptical idealism* had once again taken a firm hold of his ontological outlook. The “Triumph of Life” is a *Trionfi* influenced by the work of Petrarch and Dante.²⁸ In this poem the narrator goes through a series of visionary experiences, prompted by ontological questions and a final (at the unfinished stage of the poem) apparent receptivity to the overcoming influence of “Life.” On my philosophical reading, Shelley affirms an ascent to the knowing of negative knowledge—the only things we can know are *necessarily restricted* by our receptivity to the ‘blinding’ influence of life upon our mind. In fact, “The Triumph of Life” as we have it handed down, is Shelley’s most powerful assent to romantic irony, and the *necessary* restrictions placed upon our

metaphysical knowledge. As such, it moves away from the positive metaphysical, and anagogical presuppositions of “Adonais.”

Shelley himself wrote in “On Life” about life’s often antagonistic relationship to our understanding as a whole, and certainly its opposition to any holistic or meta-narratorial form of understanding:

We are struck with admiration at some of its transient modifications, but it is itself the great miracle. What are the changes of empires, the wreck of dynasties, with the opinions which supported them; what is the birth and the extinction of religious and political systems to life?”²⁹

The rhetorical question Shelley poses summarises what is his final position with regards to “Life”; life is in opposition to all that happens within it; or it is as a dynamic plenum and is filled with events that take place, contingently and historically. In the final instance moreover, one cannot take a step back and look at life from outside the plenum. It is in this sense that Shelley points the way toward negative forms of knowing and the contingent and historical nature of our experience. Shelley hereby once again brushes with a form of *infinite absolute negativity*, in that he has *restricted* any knowledge of the infinite into our knowledge of the immanent world. However, again like the critic Solger, he still demonstrates only a partial awareness of the fully Hegelian *Idea*. This poem is the culmination of Shelley’s metaphysical speculations, and his dialectical movement back into the corporeal world after the eschatological idealism of “Adonais”. Butter comments on Shelley’s lineage up until this final poem of his career:

There is no discontinuity between *The Triumph* and Shelley’s earlier poems, though there is a change of emphasis. Two things are present in him from start to finish—aspiration towards intellectual beauty and perception of some shadow of that beauty in people and things on earth. Both in his life and in his work he always found it difficult to combine the two, but he never wholly renounced either.³⁰

This continuity of these two aspirations is dialectical, and the change of emphasis in “The Triumph of Life” is to that of the “shadow of intellectual beauty” or a representation of *The One*, within the earthly sphere. Unfortunately, this appears unattainable, as Shelley claims in the poem “The world can hear not the sweet notes that move/ The sphere whose light is melody to lovers—/A wander worthy of his [Dante’s] rhyme.” (479-481). There is a dualism inherent in this narrative, however one which is *unrecognisable* to the masses in the sublunary sphere. In point of fact, Shelley has been all but deserted by his anagogical hopes of “Adonais.” The allusion to Dante is clear, and in this poem Shelley implicitly acknowledges that Dante, through his four-fold system rooted in the literal, had indeed successfully returned from metaphysical spheres to represent “Love” to men on earth:

Behold a wander worthy of the rhyme

“Of him who from the lowest depths of Hell,
Through every Paradise and through all glory,
Love led serene, and who returned to tell

“In words of hate and awe the wondrous story
How all things are transfigured, except Love; (471-476)

Dante’s concrete universal experience of the *Idea* is explicitly recognised by Shelley as something unattainable by most mortals, including Shelley himself up to and including “Adonais.” This recognition of Dante’s has remained inaccessible to Shelley, or has at least been something that Shelley has only been successful at rendering symbolically or mythologically, in poems such as *Prometheus Unbound*.

This negative recognition of Shelley’s, whereby he turns to negative forms of knowing, is the driving force behind what I feel are the *perspectivist* dimensions of the poem (which function in the same sense as the later *Cubism* of Braques and Picasso)—the inability of the narrator to fix on any steady unchanging, constant imagery within the poem itself—something that is echoed by the character of

Rousseau in the poem. All that is available as knowledge in the poem are the series of ‘transfigurations’ alluded to in the passage above. Transfiguration is indeed the central theme of the poem. The first transfiguration takes place after the poet watches the sunrise and, having lain awake all night, falls into a visionary trance, whereupon a vision on his “brain was rolled” (40) at the onset of day. This transfiguration leads the narrator to the experience of the stream of people who are moving without any ontological (or truly spiritual knowledge) of the path they are on, the path of Life— “All hastening onward, yet none seemed to know/ Whither he went, or whence he came, or why/ He made one of the multitude...”(47-49). The poem self-consciously poses an aporetic and rhetorical question, within the space of a vision, which is the only *truth* that will be reiterated throughout the poem—the negative knowledge of non-knowing, that dissimulates as soon as we open the question itself. The equally ambiguous shape that drives the triumphal chariot is further described by Shelley in perspectival terms: “A Janus-visaged Shadow did assume/ The guidance of that wander-winged team.” (94-95) and is further described “All the four faces of that Charioteer/ Had their eyes banded...little profit brings/ Speed in the van and blindness in the rear,” (99-101). The grotesque shape has no fixed idea of reality, seeing it as it does from four separate angles. Moreover, even though it has the *possibility* of an omniperspectival conception of reality with its four faces, they remain blindfolded. “Speed in the van and blindness in the rear.” The chariot of life has no fixed conception, rushing blindly on with no sense of where it has been or where it will be headed, or in Shelley’s words “Of all that is, has been, or will be done.—” (104). The perplexed narrator can only ask, correspondingly, ““And what is this?/ Whose shape is that within the car? & why”—’ (177-78).

In the third section of the poem, Rousseau appears and within the framing device, (a device that echoes the device used in “Alastor”), describes his own visionary experience within the phenomenal world, which ultimately leads to failure as with the visionary in “Alastor.” This failure is because Rousseau, the worshipper of nature, *as is Wordsworth*, cannot ultimately find true knowledge within the *natural world alone*. Shelley’s use of Rousseau as the narrator amplifies the anti-Wordsworthian implications of “Alastor”. Engagement with nature is possible and desirable, but will not satiate the intellectual hunger of a figure such as Rousseau (or Shelley). Rousseau admits his own defeat by Life, but claims “—I was overcome/ By my own heart alone;...” (240-41). As was the visionary in “Alastor,” who also could not temper his heart “to its object.” (243). Rousseau took his love of nature to a step much further than Wordsworth—to the social philosophy of *The Social Contract* and the sensibility of *Julie*. For Shelley, the erstwhile social reformer, the radical politics and erotic sensibility of Rousseau are concepts that move far beyond the simple pantheism of Wordsworth’s conservative poetry, especially that of works like *The Excursion*. The more feminised and seductive elements in nature that were perhaps to lead to the further developments in Rousseau were never realised by Wordsworth as he developed his poetry of *metaphysical equipoise*. Hodgson claims that the ambiguous “shape all light” (352) that appears in the poem, is symbolic of nature’s fecund and erotic draw on Rousseau’s imagination:

Now, Shelley’s “shape all light” is indeed a glorious nature-figure, as lines 343-81 make clear, but she is certainly no homely nurse or mother. Dancing like an enamoured dreamer (376ff), arousing Rousseau’s desire, evoking comparison with Venus, Eros, and Matilda, she is a creature of great beauty and seductiveness, and as such represents Shelley’s repudiation of what he took to be Wordsworth’s imaginal evasiveness and apostasy.³¹

We can oppose this erotic troping of nature to the more maternal “guide”, “mother” and “my nurse” as expressed in *The Prelude* (and discussed in Chapter Three). Rousseau’s philosophical desires and more erotic view of the natural world are evoked in the poem, through the ambiguous “Shape all light.” Additionally, the non-discursive figure of the shape allegorises Rousseau’s own visionary imagination as it attempts to penetrate the secrets of nature itself, and from these secrets derive a radical social and political philosophy.³² Unfortunately, desire would inevitably run Rousseau dry and he would also fall victim to the procession of Life. In fact, trust in a simple nature philosophy can lead the poet into error and illusion, as happened with Wordsworth. Butter claims:

The natural beauty all around him tends to make him forget whatever experiences he may have had before. On the one hand, natural beauty seems in special moments of vision to be a manifestation of something beyond itself—and perhaps indeed it is so; on the other hand, it is dangerous, it may cause its lover to forget the source from which it, perhaps, comes; it may lead down rather than up the Platonic ladder.³³

The experience of the narrator and Rousseau in “The Triumph of Life” leads “down the Platonic ladder” because the ambiguity of experience manifests itself in the continuing questions and the blinding light that Shelley adumbrates. In fact, as I shall outline below, Shelley even transfigures the “forms” traditionally associated with Plato, and they are transfigured into self-referential shadow-forms that ‘play’ only in relation to each other.

The “Shape all light” indeed gives the narrating Rousseau no recourse to definite knowledge of his place in the universe, and in offering him Nepenthe to his question “ ‘Into this valley of perpetual dream,/ Shew whence I came, and where I am, and why—/Pass not away upon the passing stream.’” (397-99), places him further into a realm of forgetfulness, where there is no ultimate answer to questions, only a

constant deferral of absolute meaning. Consequently, any transcendental sphere (such as *The One*) remains dislocated from the sublunary sphere. After Rousseau takes the cup of Nepenthe to his lips we are informed:

And suddenly my brain became as sand

“Where the first wave had more than half erased
The track of deer on desert Labrador,
Whilst the fierce wolf from which they fled amazed

“Leaves his stamp visibly upon the shore
Until the second bursts—so on my sight
Burst a new Vision never seen before.—

“And the fair shape waned in the coming light
As veil by veil the silent splendour drops
From Lucifer, amid the chrysolite

“Of sunrise ere it tinge the mountain-tops—
And as the presence of that fairest planet
Although unseen is felt by one who hopes

“That his day’s path may end as he began it,
In that star’s smile, whose light is like the scent
Of a jonquil when evening breezes fan it, (405-420)

The loss of Lucifer as the star that remains forever shining, even when blinded by the sunlight and the prismatic “dome of many coloured glass” is central to the poem here. The faith in this ever-shining morning star existing independently of the sublunary realm is key; in fact it functions as an allegory for Shelley’s own faith in “the white radiance of eternity” and *The One*. The transfigurations in the sublunary sphere are permanent—the new vision supersedes the old, or inscribes itself over the old, as the deer are chased away by the wolf. Rousseau’s Elysian, pre-symbolic paradise is erased, and the transfigurations that characterise Life continue. Nature and “the Shape all light” have in one sense betrayed the soul who followed them, and have returned this soul, through seduction, to the triumph of Life. The transcendental realm of eternity, though the visionary keeps faith with it, is itself

transfigured and superseded by the original light of life—or the Car with the Janus-faced driver, blindly careering into nothingness. This third vision further recalls the original “waking dream” (42) of the poem’s narrator, who at the beginning of the poem entered into a visionary state of mind, or a “trance of wondrous thought.” (41). As the vision on his brain “was rolled” so Rousseau’s vision appeared as his “brain became as sand.” Both visions taking place as Lucifer is replaced by the Sun further symbolises the idea that faith in the higher realm of eternity is something that the poet/visionary can retain, but which, unlike in the anagogical transcendence in “Adonais”, is perpetually erased by our experience of Life. This is similar also to the experience of the visionary in “Alastor” where he awakens after his autoerotic encounter with his ideal other and “sleep/ Like a dark flood suspended in its course/ Rolled back its impulse on his vacant brain.” The tenor is the same: a visionary eroticism that cannot be sustained, and will be replaced by Life, or *the reality principle*. Rousseau actually symbolises the original shape of light as Lucifer in the poem and informs the narrator:

“Through the sick day in which we wake to weep
Glimmers, forever sought, for ever lost.—
So did the shape its obscure tenour keep

“Beside my path, as silent as a ghost;
But the new Vision, and its cold bright car,
With savage music, stunning music, crost

“The forest, and as if from some dread war
Triumphantly returning, the loud million
Fiercely extolled the fortune of her star—.

“A moving arch of victory, the vermillion
And green and azure plumes of Iris had
Built high over her wind-winged pavilion, (430-441)

The Vision of life, as allegorised by the wolf chasing the deer, dispels the undifferentiated, pre-symbolic stage and enters the poet into the symbolic stage of

consciousness. This stage is exemplified by shadows, which represent the symbols, or simulacra, of other forms; however, these are not the forms of Plato, but forms or symbols that act like phantoms and lead mankind into delusion. This is also the self-reflexive delusion, which has dogged Rousseau and is now to dog the narrator, as he finds he himself has fallen into a trance activated by the new day, after he has kept an all night vigil under the stars. He finds himself *not sheltered* by a vision, but under the “green and azure plumes of Iris” under her “wind-winged pavilion” or the equivalent “dome of many-coloured glass.”

This new, third vision of Rousseau’s, has in effect placed the narrator back where he was at the commencement of the poem, within the original vision of Life. This is a consequence of the cyclical limits of our knowledge of non-knowing; self-reflexive negativity that leads us back to the starting post in an ever-repeating circle. This is further the *enunciation* of a new, historical inscription, or *fall* into philosophy and metaphysics; a fall to be repeated again and again, as new visionaries project new visions onto the well-worn historical-palimpsest that translates as the “dome of many-coloured glass,” behind which supposedly lies an *absolute presence*. This is the reason for “the shape all light” behind which we never find any transcendental presence, but after experiencing which, we constantly fall back into various historical paradigms, bred from new shapes of light and disclosures of being. Rousseau informs the narrator:

I cried— “the world and its mysterious doom

“Is not so much more glorious than it was,
That I desire to worship those who drew
New figures on its false and fragile glass

“As the old faded.”—“Figures ever new
Rise on the bubble, paint them how you may;
We have but thrown, as those before us threw,

“Our shadows on it as it past away. (244-251)

Shelley addresses the historicity of Western metaphysics—every time a new Shelley or Rousseau appears a new “Shape all light” announces itself out of the pre-symbolic wilderness and the process of inscription commences again. Shelley also reverses the traditional metaphor of light and darkness, as the vehicle for the tenor of modern Western philosophy. The light for Shelley is paradoxically a form of darkness, because it never gives us definitive knowledge, but precludes final interpretation. It is further a self-projection: “*We* have but thrown, as *those before us* threw” and these projections are “*Our shadows.*” The “New figures on its false and fragile glass” are the new inscriptions which are only to be superseded by further inscription. Unfortunately, there is no dialectical progression in this knowledge of non-knowing. Every time a new “Shape all light appears” it throws us into a new discursive relation with reality and therefore Rousseau refuses to acknowledge or follow the new paradigm as the world “and its mysterious doom/ Is not so much more glorious than it *was.*”

The theme of light that is so central to the poem, and its further connection to Iris as both the rainbow and the goddess who connects heaven and earth, is one that has its roots in the epoch of Western metaphysics.³⁴ It further has a strong connection to the idea of a formless shape that does not in the final instance provide form suitable for a question/answer dialectic, at least not unless we fall into an infinite regress—which is exactly what happens in “The Triumph of Life.” Emmanuel Levinas describes the relationship between light, vision and philosophical illumination thus:

The contact with light, the act of opening one’s eyes, the lighting up of bare sensation, are apparently outside any relationship, and do not take form like answers to questions. Light illuminates and is naturally understood; it is comprehension itself. But within this natural correlation between us and the world, in a sort of doubling back, a question arises, a being surprised by the illumination. The wonder

which Plato put as the origin of philosophy is an astonishment before the natural and the intelligible. It is the very intelligibility of light that is astonishing; light is doubled up with a sight. The astonishment does not arise out of comparison with some order more natural than nature, but simply before intelligibility itself. Its strangeness is, we might say, due to its very reality, to the very fact there is existence.³⁵

Light goes hand in hand with intelligibility, but as in the “Triumph of Life” it also leads to a certain sense of “wonder” that strikes Rousseau. The “astonishment before the natural and the intelligible” is exactly what dogs Rousseau in the poem—it is a question of origins—and the fact that beyond the “Shape all light” which creates the wonderment, there is no further question; if one falls into this trap one falls into an infinite regress of questions, which is the regress and aporia Shelley represents in the poem. “The Triumph of Life” on this reading therefore can also be read as a sort of philosophic catharsis for Shelley. There is a realisation exorcised in the vehicle of the poem that there are indeed limits to his own philosophical speculations, which remain phenomenologically grounded within the physical world of light and darkness we inhabit, or under the “Dome of many coloured glass.”

There is a continual displacement of being-as-light commencing as the narrator falls into his early trance at sunrise. The first trance is displaced by the figure of light driving the Car, next we encounter the “Shape all light” and finally we read of the final encounter with light, in shadows and forms at the end of the poem. The appearance of the central “Shape all light” is also both a self-revelation and a self-concealment—a darkness and a revealing. The light reveals itself as shape, but at the same time has no figure and therefore conceals itself and this is an epistemological paradox central to the meaning of the poem. The dissimulation of originary presence as Rousseau first experiences the “shape all light” is reinforced by the lines “And still before her on the dusky grass/ Iris her many-coloured scarf had drawn.—” (356-57). This is because Iris provides a *photological* projection onto the dome, outside of

which a now paradoxically absent-presence inheres. The prismatic imagery is expanded upon by Rousseau, as he describes the specular nature of the light as it plays on the stream, moving erotically and entrancingly until he claims:

“All that was seemed as if it had been not—
As if the gazer’s mind was strewn beneath
Her feet like embers, and she, thought by thought,

“Trampled its fires into the dust of death,
As Day upon the threshold of the east
Treads out the lamps of night, until the breath

“Of darkness reilluminates even the least
Of heaven’s living eyes—like day she came,
Making the night a dream;... (385-393)

Noticeably, Rousseau speaks of himself in the third person and uses the phrase “the gazer’s mind,” because in explaining this process, he attempts to dislocate *himself* from this displacement of being in order to frame a narrative reference—in order to step outside of the experience of disclosure or announcement of Being. In doing this he *dedoubles* his self and recognises his inability to re-inhabit the originary experience associated with *wonder*; Rousseau enters the realm of the impersonal doubling allegory in order to contextualise the experience for the narrator. His mind once again suffers from anterograde amnesia as he explains: “All that was, seemed as if it had been not.” Thoughts “strewn beneath her feet like embers” are then trampled “into the dust of death.” The true thoughts of Rousseau are therefore obliterated, like bright embers surrounded by darkness. Or, as Hogle claims of the experience:

Each rising thought now seems a murderous distancing of the “fading coal” that its predecessor has become, and the meter (or stepping of feet) in the poetic and musical movement of the shape appears to encourage a regular, rhythmic disfigurement of each thought by the one that follows it only to kill it.³⁶

Rousseau represents the experience primarily by light and specular imagery and secondarily through the effacing metrical feet of the poem. This multiple use of semiotic codes plays out the effacement of knowledge, demonstrating the ultimate knowledge of non-knowing. Shelley *refracts* his experience the only way he can, in the light of day. The shape is described thus: “like day she came,/ Making the night a dream;” and this symbolic patterning recalls us to the commencement of the poem where the narrator tells us that as the Sun fills the sky he has thoughts from the night that “must remain untold” (21). He has *already* experienced thoughts similar to those of Rousseau, but his own thoughts now remain hidden; for the same reason that Rousseau’s are trampled into embers by the power of the epochal experience—so the narrator’s are “trampled” by the morning sun. The sunlight both reveals and conceals, and the narrator is left with his faith in Lucifer and the metaphysical possibility that “his day’s path may end as he began it.”

Dialectical aesthetic progress is truncated by Shelley in his final poem; or one could say it is “trampled.” Thoughts are constantly effaced, and experiences superseded by new experiences, questions are replaced and answered by new questions and the central figures of light constantly “trample” thoughts into new transfigurations. In effect, the narrator and Rousseau remain trapped in “wonder” at their new experiences of Being, and in one sense can never get beyond this experience—or can never find a transcendental solution to their recurring aporia. As I discussed in Chapter Two, the Hegelian apprehension of the *Idea* requires a process of being forced out of one sphere of ontological disclosure into another, and central to this process is the appreciation of *the concrete universal* as the whole of the *Idea*. Shelley and (at least in this poem) Rousseau have problems in that they firstly only appreciate being in terms of an *abstract universal*, and therefore only

formulate being in terms of a *compositum* of elements from which it is *abstracted*. This necessarily leads to a philosophical error which is the fact that they (as have other thinkers) keep returning to the same ontological point whereby they attempt to inscribe a new *historicism*, or a new grand narrative through which to disclose Being. One of the reasons for this is the reliance (at least in Shelley) upon the affectivity of *aesthetics*, a formulation that, in a Hegelian sense, only allows a partial and synechdochic disclosure of Being. Another is that their apprehension of the initial wonder of Being is by its very nature incomplete. This is because they are attempting to formulate a unity at the beginning of the dialectical process, as does Schelling in his *Identity Philosophy*, without going through the dialectical process that is responsible for the fully concrete apprehension of *Spirit*. This anti-dialectical form of ontological stasis is the reason for the continuing questions that both the narrator and Rousseau are forced into asking. As Paul de Man rightly claims:

The answer to the question (of both the narrator and Rousseau) is another question, asking what and why one asked, and thus receding even further from the original query. This movement of effacing and of forgetting becomes prominent in the text and dispels any illusion of dialectical progress or regress.³⁷

Not only the questions, but also the corresponding visual erasures further add to the sense of an ontological *Tabula Rasa*, where experience constantly re-inscribes itself. In “Tintern Abbey” Wordsworth cognised new experiences in relation to old experiences; experience acted in the manner of a historical palimpsest, and as such there was a dialectical paradox which moved both regressively but also progressively. The future for Wordsworth was guaranteed by the past, due to the teleology of his aesthetic logic. For Shelley, this dialectical movement is not allowed to take place; instead there is a historical rupture, and meaning is poured out as soon as the poet’s mind attempts a dialectical progression. This is due to the

presupposition that *The One* is ready-made in a pre-dialectical state. Shelley in effect creates a recurring state of ontological angst within the poem.

In the final vision reported by Rousseau, after he takes the cup of Nepenthe to his lips, (we are not ultimately informed whether he drinks the Nepenthe or not)³⁸ he describes a shadow play of signification, of inscriptions and re-inscriptions within which the human race remains bound. As I claimed above, the *forms* are drained of their positive Platonic meaning and become shadows of shadows, further significations that lead in a regress to no final point of presence. G.M. Matthews claims of this shadow-play:

Those (followers of the Car) not engaged in self-deception misinterpret the physical world, pursuing the shadows of other objects. The young leading the actual pageant dance “as fleet as shadows”, are “like moths”—butterflies of darkness; the old who follow it dance with shadows (their constantly interposing remorseful memories) as well as with one another. Besides, everyone manufactures mental “shadows” or images, thoughts and emotions perpetually thrown off as Lucretian simulacra of his own personality; each of these quickly surrenders its integrity and is distorted to evil by the “creative ray” of the Car.³⁹

The shadows are signifiers within the symbolic realm of consciousness that, in a Saussurean sense, lead in a cloudy web of interrelationships from one concept to another. However, these forms are not the Platonic forms important to Shelley’s (up to this point) ontological principles. This appears to be a return to the realm of *necessity*; but it is a necessity bound within the structural rules of the symbolic language used to express that world—and it is an expression that constantly *transfigures* itself. These are further the semiotic chains that the narrator and Rousseau remain bound within, without access to a transcendental signified to remove the visionary-poet from this cyclical and self-referential realm. Matthews further comments that “The symbolic terms in which the poem is conceived are inclusive; there is nowhere outside them for potencies to develop that are not already

shown as fully exercised.”⁴⁰ Or, the forms are self-referential and play within their own symbolic sphere. The conflicting forces within the poem all clash within a semiotic grid that cannot be fully referential—anagogically, allegorically or morally, to a transcendental sphere outside its own space. De Man argues that the “shape all light” also represents a *punctum* of all signification, a positing and a beginning, beyond which we cannot go; the ultimate figure of all figurality and all forms of articulation or semiotics:

We now understand the shape to be the figure for the figurality of all signification. The specular structure of the scene as a visual plot of light and water is not the determining factor but merely an illustration (*hypotyposis*) of a plural structure that involves natural entities only as principles of articulation amongst others. It follows that the figure is not naturally given or produced but that it is posited by an arbitrary act of language. The appearance and the waning of the light-shape, in spite of the solar analogon, is not a natural event resulting from the mediated interaction of several powers, but a single, and therefore violent, act of power achieved by the positional power of language considered by and in itself: the sun masters the stars because it *posits* forms, just as “life” subsequently masters the sun because it posits, by inscription, the “track” of historical events.⁴¹

De Man’s poststructuralist reading treats the shape of light as the first inscription, upon which historicity is then premised. Moreover, “being” is contingent, with its foundation on an arbitrary act of positing or “violence.” This is once again a reference to the first visual experience, premised on metaphors of light and darkness, which are then reversed by Shelley to symbolise the experience of “Life” as it posits itself at the birth of a metaphysical system of inscribed historicity. A system, which can then be re-set and repeated infinitely. Life itself triumphs as the car is set in motion by an arbitrary act of violence; after both Shelley and Rousseau enter their “trance” or “vision” the procession of historicity begins. We then spectate as the list of historical personages from Plato to Napoleon follows the car, which is also the

narratorial march of arbitrary signification in the final section of the poem, or the “Shadows of shadows” (488).

In conclusion, Shelley has entered into a dialectical situation in which he has attempted to transcend the position taken up by Wordsworth. In problematising the relationship between the visionary imagination and the natural world in poems such as “Mont Blanc” and “Alastor”, he goes on to formulate an anagogical solution to the “intellectual love of beauty” that so haunted his life and metaphysics in “Adonais.” Unfortunately, this position itself I have argued was unstable and untenable, in part due to his failure to fully take up Dante’s quadruple topography and root his work in the *literal hermeneutical* level. Shelley’s disembodied vision is finally “trampled” in his final poem, “The Triumph of Life,” where his treatment of visionary experience leads to a final aporia. The vision collapses into a cyclical pattern of repetition, and remains subsumed under the transfigurative movement of “Life.” Shelley finally sees no way through to “the white radiance of eternity” and remains entrapped by *Urania* and *Iris*, under the “Dome of many coloured glass.” Or as Woodman claims “Iris’ function, like that of Urania in “Adonais”, is to come between the poet and the object of his quest, which is reunion with the One.”⁴² In terms of recognition, Shelley remains philosophically isolated, with what appears an indifferent world that comes between his *aesthetic recognition within* the external world, and *without*, in the supersensible realm of *The One*.

In the next chapter, I locate Shelley’s final poem in an alternative hermeneutical phenomenological space, one where Shelley is able to conceptualise an *ironic recognition* through a realisation of his own epistemic limits. His knowledge of non-knowing is a knowledge that actually inspires an acute phenomenological awareness—an awareness that postulates one of the new post-romantic aesthetic

discourses, and one that can actually be discerned in parts of the work of Wordsworth. The triumph of what Shelley terms “Life” is actually an ironic recognition of the limits of our subjective experience, and an absorption into contingent historical processes. In Shelley’s own words:

What is life? Thoughts and feelings arise, with or without our will, and we employ words to express them. We are born, and our birth is *unremembered*, and our infancy remembered but in fragments; we live on, and in living we lose the apprehension of life. How vain is it to think that words can penetrate the mystery of our being! Rightly used they may make evident our ignorance to ourselves, and this is much. For what are we? Whence do we come? And whither do we go?⁴³

The question of words being unable to “penetrate the mystery of our being” and the questions at the end of this quote aptly summarise what I feel was Shelley’s attitude when composing “The Triumph of Life.” One in which a *true* understanding of life would have to be couched in the ironic recognition of our own ontological and epistemological limits. This is in turn a post-romantic conception, or at least another variant form of Romanticism, to which I will now turn.

Notes

1. Shelley for example was convinced of the idea of *political associations* in order to foment political change, whereas Godwin believed this would lead to bloodshed, and was more in favour of an “armchair radicalism.” Having read Shelley’s revolutionary pamphlet written whilst in Ireland in 1812, Godwin responded by claiming: “...Your views and mine as to the development of mankind are decisively at issue. You profess the immediate object of your efforts to be ‘the organisation of a society, whose institution shall serve as a bond to its members’. If I may be allowed to understand my book on *Political Justice*, its pervading principle is, that association is a most ill-chosen and ill-qualified mode of endeavouring to promote the political happiness of mankind.” Quoted in Richard Holmes, *Shelley: The Pursuit* (London: Harper Collins, 1974), p. 122.
2. Baron d’ Holbach was one of the French encyclopaedists, whose most famous work was *Le Systeme de la Nature* (1770). This work was particularly pertinent to Shelley due to its atheism. The laws of cause and effect were for d’ Holbach adequate for explicating the physical universe and the world of human action and agency. He believed there was no need of supernatural intervention in our judgement of the world or our actions. This has clear influence on Shelley, for example in his ambiguous conception of the sublime as outlined in poems such as “Mont Blanc.”
3. Shelley’s reading of the book *Academical Questions* (1805), by Sir William Drummond, was hugely influential on his mature philosophy, and the influence of Berkeley and Hume was primarily extrapolated from his reading of this particular text. Hugh Roberts has recently commented on the critical reception of Shelley’s somewhat divided philosophical stance: “An earlier generation of critics was content to see Shelley as simply confused on this issue, [of scepticism and idealism] drawing on “various traditions [that] remain imperfectly assimilated, so that one can discriminate two planes of thought in Shelley’s aesthetics” (Abrams, *Mirror and the Lamp*, 126). Since C.E. Pulos’ *Deep Truth*, however, the dominant trend of Shelley criticism has been toward establishing the coherence, consistency, and originality of Shelley’s thought. Pulos himself suggested that Shelley had forged a “skeptical idealism” out of his divided intellectual inheritance, using Drummond’s *Academical Questions* to find “a mode of reconciling the empirical and the Platonic traditions” (Pulos, 112). See Hugh Roberts, *Shelley and the Chaos of History: A New Politics of Poetry* (University Park: Pennsylvania university Press, 2004), p. 129.
4. Shelley’s concept of *The One* is amorphous, and it is a term he uses at various points in his prose as well as in poems such as “Adonais.” It seems to be Platonic, a universal ideal in the realm of the supersensible. In fact, it is arguably neoplatonic and closer to Plotinus’ concept of *Emanation*. Shelley refers to it in his essay *On Life*, in an almost Hegelian sense of a universal mind: “The words, *I, you, they* are not signs of any actual difference subsisting between the assemblages of thoughts thus indicated, but are merely marks employed to denote the different modifications of the one mind. Let it not be supposed that this doctrine conducts to the monstrous presumption, that I, the person who now write and think, am that one mind. I am but a portion of it.” In Percy Bysshe Shelley, “On Life” *Shelley’s Poetry*

and *Prose* (New York: Norton, 2002), p. 508. Shelley also refers to *The One* in the sense of the supersensible beyond in "A Defence of Poetry": "A poet partakes in the eternal, the infinite and the one; as far as relates to his conceptions, time and place and number are not." *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, p. 513.

5. *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), Act II, Scene IV, (116).
6. Harold Bloom, "The Unpastured Sea: An Introduction to Shelley," in Harold Bloom, (ed.) *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism* (New York: Norton, 1970), p. 377.
7. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 76.
8. *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, pp. 505-509.
9. See also Neville Rogers, *Shelley at Work* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 147-8.
10. I.J. Kapstein, "The Meaning of Shelley's 'Mont Blanc,'" *PMLA*, Vol. 62, No. 4, December: 1947: p. 1059.
11. F. L. Jones, (ed.) *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley, Volume 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 499.
12. Richard Holmes claims in his book (p. 340) that Coleridge had actually been to visit Mont Blanc before Shelley, when he had written the poem. This is actually incorrect; Coleridge wrote the poem whilst on Scafell Pike in the British Lake District. See Duncan Wu (ed.), *Romanticism: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), p. 505, n.1.
13. Earl Wasserman disputes the relationship to the original Greek sense of an "evil genius" even though T.L. Peacock had claimed this was the meaning behind the title. Wasserman writes "The Visionary, it is felt, ought to be thoroughly admirable or totally wrong; he should be praised for his worthy quest of an ideal or punished for a sin against humanity, especially if we take the title to mean that, since the "Spirit of Solitude" is an *alastor*, or genius that avenges by tormenting, usually for the sin of hubris, the ideal vision which the protagonist pursues beyond life is sent him as deserved punishment for spurning human love." Earl Wasserman, *Shelley: A Critical Reading* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1971), p. 11.
14. See Wu, p. 820.
15. Wasserman, p. 20.
16. Wasserman, p.18.
17. Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1971), p. 278.
18. Bloom further claims in *The Visionary Company* that the poem "Oh! There are Spirits of the Air" was, according to Mary Shelley, actually addressed to Coleridge. (p. 278). He writes that Shelley addresses Coleridge in relation to his own metaphysical commitments in "Dejection" and "Constancy" in the same poem. Bloom claims of Shelley's treatment of Coleridgean metaphysics: "The composite form of all the poet creates or loves, his Emanation, does emanate from him when he is still in possession of the Joy of the Imagination. But when it exists as a mere external form, independent of him, it is likely to seem mocking and tantalizing. In response to this mockery, his sense of self may seek refuge in abstractions, as Coleridge does in *Dejection*, until the self and abstraction merge into the menacing and self-accusing figure of the Spectre. You are in your Spectre's power, Shelley's

poem warns Coleridge, and a continued struggling will only intensify that power, and aggravate an already darkly settled fate.” (p.280). Or in my Hegelian reading, the abstractions result from a *compositum* or *abstract universal*, formulated from Coleridge’s own experience of the world, which leads to a growing alienation as his work progresses. This culminates in his pursuit of a never-attainable sense of philosophical unity; never attainable because of the divided nature of Coleridge’s conception of universals, or his divided *compositum*. Coleridge finishes up pursuing his ideal in the form of the *Brocken Spectre*, whereas Shelley ends up *pursued* by his own idealisms. For example, in “Alastor” he remains in a sense *haunted* by the erotic dream figure.

19. For an excellent discussion of Shelley’s dichotomy between the transcendental ideal in *Apollo* and the receptive ideal in *Pan*, see Wasserman, pp. 46-56.
20. It is interesting to compare this positive treatment of the old ruins of man, and the philosophical significance of these ruins, with the more negative ideas espoused in Shelley’s later sonnet, “Ozymandias” (1818).
21. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Hegel’s Existentialism” in *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. Hubert & Patricia Dreyfuss (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 67-68. Merleau-Ponty goes on to write that the closest we get to death is the process of mutual recognition, in which we existentially reduce each other to the status of an object. This of course is mutually negated and recognition is fully completed, by the very nature of inter-subjective consciousness itself.
22. The section of the poem on the Chorasmain shore begins at line 272, and continues right to the point the poet is left upon a mossy precipice on line 625. Just before the composition of “Alastor” Shelley had been on a boat trip on the Thames with Thomas Love Peacock, Charles Clairmont and Mary in August-September 1815. We also have the previous experience of Shelley’s trip down the Rhine in the summer of 1814. Holmes also claims that, as well as being influenced by the river trips, the poem was about Shelley’s own recent introspection, and that the river symbol actually represents this deeper introspective search into the human mind. He quotes Shelley as saying, “The poem entitled *Alastor* may be considered as allegorical to one of the most interesting situations of the human mind.” (p. 300). This indeed does open the way to a psychological, or *psychoanalytical* reading of the poem; however I feel that the philosophical reading not only reveals richer insights into the poem but also reflects Shelley’s own psychology at the time anyway.
23. For, what is in my opinion, the most thorough reading of “Adonais” available, see Wasserman, pp. 462-502.
24. Ross Woodman, *The Apocalyptic Vision in the Poetry of Shelley* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), p. 160.
25. Shelley believed that an article in the *Quarterly Review* (April 1818) was responsible for Keats’ ultimate demise from consumption. He also erroneously attributed the article to Southey, it was actually written by Croker. Stanza 38 reads:

Nor let us weep that our delight has fled
Far from those carrion kites that scream below—
He wakes or sleeps with the enduring dead;

Thou canst not soar where he is sitting now.
 Dust to the dust! But the pure spirit shall flow
 Back to the burning fountain whence it came,
 A portion of the eternal, which must glow
 Through time and change, unquenchably the same,
 Whilst thy cold embers choke the sordid earth of shame.

26. Woodman, p. 160.
27. Woodman, p. 173.
28. The poem more particularly recalls the five-parts of the Petrarchan *Capitoli*. Some commentators have argued that Shelley may have been intending to write a series of *Trionfi* which would gradually develop a more positive stance by covering more areas of Shelley's metaphysical speculations. Miriam Allot claims that Shelley may have been attempting a *pastiche* of the six poems written by Petrarch between 1338 and his death in 1374. She writes: "The thought is seductive that he might have planned a sequel, or even a series of 'Trionfi', in order to celebrate Life's defeat by the values which preserved his 'sacred few' from destruction and which kept awake even in so damaged a spirit as his Rousseau some degree of redeeming self-knowledge." See Miriam Allot, "The Reworking of a Literary Genre: Shelley's *The Triumph of Life*", in Miriam Allot (ed.) *Essays on Shelley* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1982), p. 253. It seems to me however, in light of Shelley's overall philosophical dialectics, the struggle Shelley recorded in his poetry, and the ideal "white radiance of eternity," that he had reached as an apotheosis in "Adonais" that Shelley was recording the final *sceptical* collapse of his precarious poetic vision.
29. "On Life," p. 505.
30. P.H. Butter, "Sun and Shape in Shelley's *The Triumph of Life*," *The Review of English Studies, New Series*, Vol. 13, No. 49, Feb., 1962, p. 49.
31. John A. Hodgson, "The World's Mysterious Doom: Shelley's *The Triumph of Life*," *ELH*, Vol. 42, No. 4, Winter, 1975, p. 613.
32. The fascination of penetrating the secrets of nature, albeit scientifically, and troping nature as feminine are of course also powerful elements within Shelley's own early experiments at Oxford, and were to recur as a subtheme in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818).
33. Butter, 47-48.
34. See Jeff Malpas, "Beginning in Wonder: Placing the origin of thinking" in Nikolas Kompridis (ed.) *Philosophical Romanticism* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 282-3. Malpas makes the valuable point that both Aristotle and Plato associated Iris with the rainbow and with wonder. He quotes Plato in the *Theatatus*, 155d, as saying "He was not a bad genealogist who said that Iris [the rainbow/ messenger of heaven] is the child of thaumas [wonder]..."
35. Emmanuel Levinas, quoted in Malpas, p. 284.
36. Jerold Hogle, *Shelley's Process: Radical Transference and the Development of His major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 322.
37. Paul de Man, "Shelley Disfigured", *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 95.
38. In "On Shelley's 'The Triumph of Life,'" *Studia Neophilologica*, 34:1: pp. 116-119, G.M. Matthews discusses at some detail the question as to whether Rousseau actually drinks from the cup or not. He states the ambiguity of the

lines thus “The difficulties of this episode are not alleviated by the fact that lines 392-405 of the draft are missing. Is Rousseau seduced by life as a result of drinking, or as a result of not drinking? If the former, it seems that the Shape betrays him, and must be evil; if the latter, why did Shelley not make his meaning clear?” p. 116. I feel that Rousseau’s drinking from the cup and the ensuing vision tells us that he did drink from the cup, however this shows us philosophically not that the Shape is *evil*, but that the forgetfulness brought on by Nepenthe is analagous to the constant displacement of being that comes through the various disclosures of being that take place in the poem.

39. Matthews, p. 122.

40. Matthews, p. 111.

41. de Man, p. 121.

42. Woodman, p. 188.

43. Shelley, “On Life,” p. 506.

Chapter Five

The Contingent Limits of Romantic Myth-Making

1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I claimed that by the time of the “Triumph of Life” Shelley had come to a post-romantic recognition that there is no position of pure aesthetic autonomy and of world—transcendence, acquiescing to the historicity and contingency of human experience. Following Shelley’s logic, I sought to describe this new position in terms the *knowledge of non-knowing*. In this chapter I gather together the different strands of discussion and conclude with a two-part argument about English romantic discourse. In the first two sections, I argue that Wordsworth and Coleridge set up a distinct romantic discourse that we can read in retrospect as illuminating some of the inherent tensions in romantic metaphysics. This particular discourse, as I have argued throughout, is inherent in the struggle towards an *aesthetic recognition* as understood as part of the personal and critical conversation between Wordsworth and Coleridge. I also use a phenomenological perspective to postulate that the work of both poets is based upon their relative sense of embodiment. In the next section, I argue that the *literalisation* of this discourse—a process in part due to its gaining common acceptance and currency as a recognisable romantic discourse—enables Shelley to produce a second-order discourse that affirms *non-knowing*. Shelley is able to usher in a new shape of romantic experience that *acknowledges* the ironic, embodied, historicist, perspectival and contingent nature of experience. In this paradigm shift, English Romanticism leaves behind the metaphysical aspirations of one of its old discourses and takes up a new sub-discourse of *ironism*. In the final section, I turn to Mary Shelley and argue that in her novel *Frankenstein*, one of the themes she explores is the limits of romantic metaphysics and allegorises these limits in a different epistemic realm, that of

scientism. She does this through the protagonist Victor Frankenstein, who upon my reading not only represents the romantic poet/metaphysician, but also *embodies* these romantic hopes in the creature. Thus, Mary Shelley further elaborates upon a particular romantic irony that can be traced back to the discourse of Wordsworth and Coleridge. I conclude by arguing that these problematisations facilitate the situating of romantic aesthetics in a distinct domain that belongs neither to scientism nor to philosophy. One of the things romantic aesthetics can do in actual fact is give us a privileged knowledge of the contingent and ironic limits of all of our epistemic practices. Therefore, Hegel's conception of the *concrete universal* can be reversed if we situate aesthetics above, or at least on a par with, discursive forms of knowing such as philosophy.

2. The romantic discourse of Wordsworth and Coleridge

Up until this point I have argued that Wordsworth and Coleridge, as part of their poetic programme, were engaged in the attempt to resolve the tensions in a dialectic that was constructed around aesthetic autonomy and natural receptivity. Coleridge remained at a philosophical *impasse*, which culminated in poems such as "Constancy to an Ideal Object" and "Dejection." In these poems, he either projects his hopes on to another character such as Sara or Hartley, or he allegorises this epistemic aporia as the *Brocken Spectre* in "Constancy" and in the ensuing sense of homelessness experienced by the pursuer of the spectre. Wordsworth, on the other hand, attains a sense of *metaphysical equipoise* between the two positions by way of his trope of organicism, which posits a transcendental connection to the universe. It also functions in the same way as Hegel's *concrete universal*, in that it affords Wordsworth a *Weltanschauung* whereby the alienating presence of nature is subsumed within the overall *organic idea*.

Stanley Cavell has characterised the romantic treatment of scepticism in terms of our position between “two worlds” in the aftermath of Kantian metaphysics:

One romantic use for this idea of two worlds lies in its accounting for the human being’s dissatisfaction with, as it were, itself. It appreciates the ambivalence in Kant’s central idea of limitation, that we simultaneously crave its comfort and crave escape from its comfort, that we want unappeasably to be lawfully wedded to the world and at the same time illicitly intimate with it, as if the one stance produced the wish for the other, as if the best proof of human existence were its power to yearn, as if for its better, or other, existence. Another romantic use for this idea of two worlds is its offer of a formulation of our ambivalence towards Kant’s ambivalent settlement, or a further insight into whatever that settlement was a settlement of—an insight that the human being now lives in *neither* world, that we are, as it is said, between worlds.¹

There is a romantic acknowledgment of our relationship between these “two worlds” which is being formulated in the romantic discourse, and its tensions, which are acknowledged in some of the poetry of Coleridge and Wordsworth. However, whereas Coleridge remains in an uncertain space between these two worlds, in the state of an infinite *Sehnsucht*, Wordsworth at times attains *metaphysical equipoise* and manages to balance the two worlds in his aesthetic response to the world. In fact, Wordsworth manages to attain more than a *mere* balance, by subsuming the worlds into the balanced universe of his *organic-concrete universal*. Wordsworth’s aesthetic recognition of his embodied (in his trope “wedded”) place in the world provides a poetic rendering of Hegel’s triadic movement—one that works itself out in an aesthetic response to the world as opposed to a philosophical one. On the other hand, Coleridge remains in a state of the *abstract universal*, and remains in this sense alienated from the natural world.

Cavell further alludes to this difference in final outlook between Coleridge and Wordsworth when he discusses the Platonic implications of Wordsworth’s “Intimations of Immortality Ode” (1815). The poem is an acknowledgment of the

Platonic conception of the immortal soul, and in Cavell's argument the Platonic conception of *partaking* in the forms of the ideal world. On Cavell's reading Wordsworth, in acknowledging the immortality of the soul and the breaking or loss engendered in birth and participated in during adulthood (in the mature poet who in effect participates in this loss by re-enacting it in adulthood) recognises (or acknowledges) his place in the "dream of human life." This is both an epistemological and a psychological response to scepticism by the poet-as therapist. (Cavell compares this process to Freudian psychoanalytical processes of recovery, remembering and repression).

What we are instructed to recollect, to call back and to gather together, is a sleep and a forgetting. "Sleep" is characterized earlier as the region of fields from which the winds come, which I take as pretty straight romantic code for creative inspiration. And later the child's play is described as constituting "some fragment from his dream of human life." Hence in this respect to participate in the child's work, in his inspiration towards life, is to recollect the dream of life, as from fragments, as if the whole vocation of becoming human, of suffering birth, were endless participation in such a dream, that human life will come to pass. Only so can we recollect that we are not yet the fulfillment of this dream.²

The visionary poet partakes in eternal processes and acknowledges them only by communing with nature, and then recognising the deeper implications of this communing, by further re-enacting and remembering these experiences from childhood. These childhood experiences in turn entailed a further repression or forgetting. Coleridge however glosses Wordsworth's treatment of interaction with the external world in this poem by in fact *avoiding* (or repressing) the deeper animistic implications of Wordsworth's ideal of "communicating with objects"³ or in effect holistically communicating with the external world of nature. For Coleridge, this romanticisation of the external world, this sense of communing with objects, is unavailable to his divided consciousness towards which the external

world of nature remains forever abstract. His criticism of Wordsworth in *Biographia Literaria* therefore ignores the full implications of Wordsworth's idea of communing mystically with objects of the external world. In fact, Coleridge glosses it as Wordsworth's adoption of the speech of common rustics in discoursing *about* the natural world as opposed to *with* the natural world; this is a gloss that comes about due to Coleridge's own alienated consciousness, and his refusal to *acknowledge a concrete universal* absorption of the external world. Cavell claims:

When in his [Coleridge's] tremendous chapter twenty two he lists the "characteristic excellences" of Wordsworth's work, he cites "Fourth; the perfect truth of nature, as taken immediately from nature, and proving long and genial intimacy with the very spirit which gives the physiognomic expression to all the works of nature." Here he has roughly glossed what Wordsworth, so far as I can judge, does mean by "communicating with objects," but instead of acknowledging this he persists in a view which takes Wordsworth, while having been granted by God an angel's capacity for singing, to have been allowed for theorizing the capacity of, let us say, a rustic. Coleridge thus romanticizes his own friend.⁴

This duality in Coleridge's criticism of Wordsworth once again reflects his own divided consciousness and attitude towards the external world. Further to this, Coleridge endorses the holistic Romanticism of Wordsworth, but in point of fact surmises in his friend's work a device of ventriloquism for reflective *rustic* discourse. Coleridge cannot *fully* endorse (even if he does *in principle* in chapter twenty two) the animism inherent in Wordsworth's idea outlined in *The Lyrical Ballads* of "communicating with objects." This encapsulates the Coleridgean romantic response to philosophical scepticism, as opposed to the Wordsworthian response. This is one of the keys to the tensions within the romantic discourse of Wordsworth and Coleridge, tensions that can be further clarified with the adoption of a phenomenological perspective.

This discourse of Wordsworth and Coleridge, and the changing dynamics and aporias it raises, can be read as reactions to the world, which are also unconsciously based upon the phenomenological being-in-the-world of both poets. Their romantic discourse can be interpreted as based upon an attitude in the world which is not fully completed—an attitude which is *in process* and which has yet to be fully self-determined because it is still establishing its own parameters. This is the movement of the struggle for *aesthetic recognition* of both poets, which culminates for Wordsworth in his *organic aesthesis* and for Coleridge in a sceptical aporia. These philosophical positions are centred on a varying relationship to the external world between the *concrete* and the *abstract*—or embodiment *within* the world and projection *onto* the world. This is the deeper reason for the philosophical vacillation between Wordsworth and Coleridge. According to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in exploring our being-in-the-world we vacillate between concrete and abstract movements of consciousness, centred on our body and our relationship to our body.

The abstract movement carves out within that plenum of the world in which concrete movement took place a zone of reflection and subjectivity; it superimposes upon physical space a virtual or human space. Concrete movement is therefore centripetal whereas abstract movement is centrifugal. The former occurs in the realm of being or of the actual, the latter on the other hand in that of the virtual or the non-existent; the first adheres to a given background, the second throws out its own background. The normal function which makes abstract movement possible is one of ‘projection’ whereby the subject of movement keeps in front of him an area of free space in which what does not naturally exist may take on a semblance of existence.⁵

This is an embodiment that acts in correlation with the poet’s creative activity. In Wordsworth there is a tension between these two poles worked out on the site of some of his poetry and this is most obvious in poems such as “Tintern Abbey.” In Chapter Three I pointed to the fact that Wordsworth moves from the phenomenality of the general landscape towards the corporeality of his body—in fact to the point

where “the motion of our human blood/ Almost suspended, we are laid asleep.” This movement is grounded centripetally in the realm of the actual, and spreads to the inner-self of the poet. Additionally, in the vale of Grasmere the relationship of his body to the surrounding environs is paramount; and as he recognises in the physical landscape a form of *Deus sive natura*, the landscape becomes a physical home for the poet and his sister who have been somewhat rootless since their return from Goslar. However, if Wordsworth’s ideology of organic embodiment moves centripetally from a concrete conceptualisation of the world based upon our being-in-the-world, Coleridge’s work lies more heavily in the abstract realm whereby the poet “superimposes upon the physical space a virtual or human space.” Thus in “Dejection” we have the famous lines discussed in Chapter Two, where the poet “cannot from outward forms” satisfy the imaginative realm of the inner, subjective and *projected* aesthetic. Coleridge’s poetics operate within the same *epoche* as Wordsworth, however he remains ensconced within the abstract projection of subjectivity. Wordsworthian organicism however exhibits a more keenly felt awareness of the role of the body in this developing discourse, and of the need for receptivity to the external world in order to free up his imaginative autonomy. Wordsworth’s attitude dialectically swings between centrifugal abstract movement (where he does indeed project his own subjectivity) and centripetal concrete movement where he accepts the natural world as the organic concretisation of his own nascent creative imagination.

This bi-polar movement between the centripetal and centrifugal is that which I also glossed as being the movement towards a concrete representation of *Spirit* (in the classical age) and then away from this representation in the realm of romantic/modern art in Chapter Two. From a phenomenological perspective, this

same movement is always however unconsciously centred on the body and its being-in-the-world. We can once again extrapolate from Hegel's theory and argue that the central point of reference is the *displaced* corporeal body; the symbolic phase of art operates deictically in relation to this region of understanding, the classical incorporates this self awareness perfectly in sculpture and the romantic centrifugally moves away from the central point of reference into a disembodied, abstract realm—of what is glossed by Hegel as *Spirit*.

The connection between Hegelian idealism and the romantic discourse of Wordsworth and Coleridge has been further noted by Tilottama Rajan. Rajan reads this connection in terms of disembodiment, which for Hegel leads to *Absolute Spirit* and for Coleridge (and to a much lesser extent Wordsworth due to his *organic aesthesis*) leads to aporia and scepticism. The point is however, as I have argued throughout, that all of these thinkers are tracing the same romantic narrative mythology, culminating in differing denouements. Rajan claims that Paul de Man's phenomenological emphasis on language-as-consciousness, and his deconstructing of texts such as those of Wordsworth and Coleridge within this context, places Wordsworth and Coleridge in the same *transcendent* space as Hegel, even if they are coming from a different direction. In the romantic discourse we have an almost *Mallarmean Parole*, a proto-symbolist discourse that exists autonomously from the external world:

We are told [by de Man in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*] that in the new linguistic dispensation consciousness will “exist entirely by and for itself, independently of all relationship with the outside world, without being moved by an intent aimed at part of this world” (RR, p. 16). In deconstructing Coleridge we seem, curiously, to have arrived at Hegel's resolution of the subject-object dialectic, exchanging one romantic idealist for another.⁶

Whilst I agree that Hegel is indeed a romantic idealist, indeed the romantic idealist *par excellence*, there is a problem here with Rajan's argument *vis-à-vis* de Man. Firstly, on my reading, neither Hegel nor the Romantics ever fully succeed in *transcending* the subject-object distinction. Hegel's attempt at autonomy necessarily requires receptivity to the empirical world, even in his attempt at intersubjectively transcending the two, which is accomplished for example through mutual recognition (*Anerkennung*). The *attempt at transcendence* is the driving force and the heuristic utility of Hegel's theory; we learn that there is no autonomy without receptivity to the world of external phenomena, or without the experience of other human bodies. Terry Eagleton has recently also read mutual recognition in terms of corporeality, combining Marxist materialism with Aristotelian ethics of flourishing. This embodiment actually serves an ethical purpose in that, for Eagleton, it gives one a sense of socialist empathy with others. Wordsworth for example, seeks through his attempts at recognition in others such as Dorothy, or in the more ironic recognition in characters such as the Leech Gatherer a certain *biological* mutual recognition. This recognition in High Romanticism is extended, proleptically, to the hylozoic world; and this gives rise to the moral response to the theodicy of landscape adumbrated in much of Wordsworth's work. Eagleton claims:

Rather [than realising your nature through the exercise of impulses you recognise as your own], you realise your nature in a way which allows the other to do so too. And that means that you realize your nature at its best—since if the other's self-fulfilment is the medium through which you flourish yourself, you are not at liberty to be violent, dominative or self-seeking.

The political equivalent of this situation, as we have seen, is known as socialism. When Aristotle's ethics of flourishing are set in a more interactive context, one comes up with something like the political ethics of Marx. The socialist society is one in which each attains his or her freedom and autonomy in and through the self-realization of others.⁷

On this view, through a biological recognition with others one secures a real (and political) autonomy. Moreover, in extending the romantic response to the physical world at large, (identified through nature), Wordsworth secures his own freedom (and flourishes) as a poet and a human being by the *aesthetic recognition* of himself *within* the natural world. The romantics do indeed share the Hegelian dialectical enterprise and transcendent *telos*, but even when they feel a certain imaginative autonomy they, as Hegel, are bound to, and embodied within, the empirical world. This is the reason for the Wordsworthian *organic aesthesis*, an aesthesis that *embodies* the poet within an *organic concrete universal*, and provides the backdrop for the moral element in his poetry.

Rajan goes on to outline de Man's treatment of these inherent undecidabilities and tensions within romantic texts themselves; in addition, she rightly claims that de Man, in his criticism, replaces the subject-object distinction for a rhetorical/sensuous distinction. Moreover, she also intimates that the poets use certain romantic tropes to explore this tension, tropes that also signify once again the intentional and consciousness-bound structure of their poetics:

To this we may add the use of realistic deictics, specific details about the time, place, and circumstance of composition, and references to real people like Lamb and Dorothy Wordsworth, which refigure fiction as life. Also of importance (in the conversation poems) is the address to an auditor, which transforms writing into speech, solitary musing into communal vision. These reality effects, in de Man's view, are constantly disrupted in the poems themselves by an awareness of the radical difference between linguistic and organic structures.⁸

Again, whilst I agree with the first observation about realistic deictics, I do not agree that "the reality effects...are constantly disrupted by an awareness of the radical difference between linguistic and organic structures." The "reality effects" are utilised by a poet such as Wordsworth in order to phenomenologically *ground* his

attempted autonomous vision. The *intentional consciousness* of the poet, through the medium of language, reaches out to the external world in order to embody and give content to its otherwise empty form. The assurance of a character such as Dorothy, and the attempt at recognition by Wordsworth in “Tintern Abbey”, or the embodiment of spiritual hopes within the homely Vale of Grasmere, or the address to Coleridge at the end of *The Prelude*, are all part of this process of the attempt at *aesthetic recognition*. Indeed, Wordsworth instantiates an organic aesthesis that *does not entail any tension between organic and linguistic structures*. In actual fact, the linguistic structures actually provide a semiotic medium through which Wordsworth’s intentionality operates and connects *with* the organic world, as exemplified in the *unifying* nature of the Wordsworthian symbol discussed in Chapter Three. The whole sense of a purely empty consciousness is dispelled in phenomenology by the concept of *Fundierung*. Merleau-Ponty writes of this concept:

Visual contents are taken up, utilised and sublimated to the level of thought by a symbolical power which transcends them, but it is on the basis of sight that this power can be constituted. The relationship between matter and form is called in phenomenological terminology a relationship of *Fundierung*: the symbolic function rests on the visual as on a ground; not that vision is its cause, but because it is that gift of nature which Mind was called upon to make use of beyond all hope, to which it was to give a fundamentally new meaning, yet which was needed, not only to be incarnate, but in order to be at all.⁹

So for the *realistic deictics* of the romantics as Rajan terms it, their functionality works at the symbolical level and this is the necessary relationship of *Fundierung*. The romantics may in some cases attempt to completely collapse the distinction between vehicle and tenor in the metaphoricity of their discourse, and this acts for Wordsworth as a kind of unifying move in which he tries to ground his poetry in an *aesthetic aesthesis*. This is Wordsworth’s intentionality-as-language, and as such his

attempt to *grasp* the world around him and in so doing forge a link between his consciousness and the external world. The *aesthesis* however cannot entail a purely autonomous consciousness, and remains intentionally bound to the external world, and to the corporeality of the body.

Consequently, Wordsworth explicitly acknowledged the poetic vacillation between receptivity to the external world and imaginative autonomy in some of his work. One example can be found in the series known as the *Lucy Poems*. In these poems Wordsworth explores an alternative relationship to the external world and the universe at large. Spencer Hall has commented on the “tragic humanism”¹⁰ in these poems and argues:

The speaker comes to the deepest awareness of his own, and of Lucy’s, threatened humanness precisely because he is forced beyond the interior landscape of his own mind, his own memory, to a more complete and more objective view of things. “A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal” reflects one of the major tensions in Wordsworth’s poetry: the never satisfactorily concluded attempts to move beyond self to an objectivity which would be both sufficient and necessary.¹¹

Whilst in poems such as *The Prelude* Wordsworth seeks solace in a philosophical organicism, poems such as “A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal” (1798) actually bring Wordsworth back to an almost Coleridgean alienation from the external world, or at least an indication of this in the ontological insecurity which is exhibited within these poems.¹² Whilst I *strongly disagree* with Hall’s analysis that Wordsworth *never* successfully manages “to move beyond self to an objectivity which would be both sufficient and necessary,” I would agree that in poems such as the *Lucy* series, where Wordsworth faces up to worldly fears of death and the possibility of the failure of Christian eschatology, his organicism and *metaphysical equipoise* is problematised. In these poems Wordsworth projects his self *centrifugally* onto the world, and this leads to an almost Coleridgean subjectivity. This is because his

discoursing “with objects” fails to achieve the animistic (and pantheistic) sense of *aesthetic recognition* discovered elsewhere in works such as *The Prelude* and “Tintern Abbey.” This sense for Wordsworth is one that indicates an anti-metaphysical impulse within some of his poetry—a phenomenological awareness of the possible hermeneutical *limitations* of his sense of *being-in-the-world*. This romantic awareness becomes a full disclosure of being for Shelley in “The Triumph of Life” and leads to his own particular form of *aesthetic recognition* of negative forms of knowing and his final *ironism*—a concept I explore more fully in the following section. This implicit metaphysical doubt is also the reason for the strange mediated recognition I discussed in Chapter Three, initiated at the end of “Tintern Abbey” with Dorothy, whereby he seeks an experience of intersubjectivity in which to *a fortiori* ground his organic-metaphysical trope. Wordsworth seeks a new *epoche* or space in which to operate his consciousness, but this turns out to be one in which he is constantly *reminded* of his own subjectivity as it is brought into focus as part of the poetic procedure. Thus, although he establishes an organic *aesthesis* through which he feels he connects himself to the hylozoic life of the natural world, he encounters persistent doubt in works such as the *Lucy* poems or his elegiac “Peele Castle.”

3. Shelley’s second-order discourse

This recognition in Wordsworth of an alternative state of *being-in-the-world* based upon his corporeality and varying attitudes towards his original organic *parole* would inevitably lead Romanticism, in some of its latter formations, to a self-conscious awareness of contingency and historicity. The metaphysical attitude taken up by Wordsworth and Coleridge actually deconstructs itself as a consequence of the

strong dialectical energy within the discourse developed by the two poets. Although Wordsworth posits an architectonic structure, hypostatizing his *metaphysical equipoise*, he still falls victim to metaphysical doubts in poems such as “A Slumber Did my Spirit Seal,” where a sense of contingency and historicity seeps back into his work. The instability of this particular romantic discourse of Wordsworth and Coleridge is one of the reasons for the fact that this discourse of Romanticism has been so prone to deconstructive criticism such as that of de Man, Harold Bloom and Geoffrey Hartman. A new code in the *process* of construction is more open to the process of deconstruction, due to its inherent dialectical instability at this stage of its genesis.

Wordsworth and Coleridge were in the process of developing the tools that were finally to be used by Shelley more fully, and which would eventually be superseded by the second-order discourse of contingency and historicity in the hands of Shelley. The original romantic discourse can be seen as a metaphorical language that becomes literalised later on in the hands of other writers such as Mary and Percy Shelley who adhere to the same system or vocabulary. Through this process a second-order discourse emerges that allows Shelley to create a new vocabulary, or borrowing Richard Rorty’s description, to develop a new metaphoric system of ‘reading’ or ‘disclosing’ the world.¹³ Applying this analogy to Wordsworth and Coleridge, and the dialectical situations they explored within their own poetry, one sees how they were *formulating the tools* of a romantic discourse of poetry, formulating the parameters for the new game, without bringing the game to a fully completed, and self-conscious, conclusion. Once the discourse was literalised, and taken up by writers and poets such as Byron, Shelley, Keats, and in North America, Whitman and Emerson, it became possible to use it as a tool handed down and

formulated by Wordsworth and Coleridge. Shelley does this in poems such as “Mont Blanc” and “Alastor,” in which he is clearly utilising the on-hand tools bequeathed to him by Wordsworth and Coleridge. Eventually however, just as Byron in exploring these tools would turn to irony, Shelley discovers contingency, historicity and the complete dialectical breakdown of “The Triumph of Life” and the negative forms of knowing revealed by this poem. In Rorty’s terminology, Shelley realises the value of a “poeticised culture” which is self-conscious of its inherent contingency and the continual possibilities of new vocabularies to reinvent ourselves as we please:

A poeticised culture would be one which would not insist we find the real wall behind the painted ones, the real touchstones of truth as opposed to touchstones which are merely cultural artifacts. It would be a culture which, precisely by appreciating that *all* touchstones are such artifacts, would take as its goal the creation of ever more various and multicoloured artifacts.¹⁴

Hence for Shelley, in realising this praxis of a “poeticised culture” there is a sense that there is no “real wall behind the painted ones” and there is a perpetual awareness of the “New figures on its false and fragile glass,” or in Rorty’s language of philosophical romanticism: “various and multicolored artifacts.” This leads us to an understanding of the clash between *ironism* and metaphysics that underlies the discourse of Wordsworth and Coleridge and is finally resolved in Shelley’s later work.

In Rorty’s eyes the liberal can be subdivided into the liberal ironist and the liberal metaphysician who searches for “final vocabularies,” an “ur Language” or the real wall as opposed to the “painted ones.” Therefore, romantic philosophers such as Hegel and poets such as Wordsworth and Coleridge are engaged in the metaphysical pursuit of a final vocabulary that can explain modernity and/or our place in the universe. Rorty claims that Hegel’s dialectical method actually illustrated the way

this process of progressing through different final vocabularies operates, and as such itself contains incipient *ironism*. Hegel goes wrong, in Rorty's reading, on trying to define his own method in terms of a *final vocabulary-in-itself*. The method is correct but the narratorial outcome, which reaches an absolute *denouement*, is mistaken. He claims:

What Hegel describes as the process of spirit gradually becoming self-conscious of its intrinsic nature is better described as the process of European linguistic practices changing at a faster and faster rate. The phenomenon Hegel describes is that of more people offering more radical redescrptions of more things than ever before, of young people going through half a dozen spiritual gestalt-switches before reaching adulthood. What the Romantics expressed as the claim that imagination, rather than reason, is the central human faculty was the realisation that a talent for speaking differently, rather than for arguing well, is the chief instrument of cultural change.¹⁵

A series of discourses that led to a more polysemous view of the world, post-Enlightenment and post-religious, culminated in Romanticism and the myriad interpretations of man's imaginative place in the universe, and his *imaginative sovereignty*. The shared discourse of Wordsworth and Coleridge was one among many, closely related discourses, attempting to hermeneutically determine a metaphysical basis for the universe. This preoccupation is represented equally in Hegel's dialectic, except, as I have argued, Hegel reaches his *telos* of *Absolute Spirit* by envisioning reason as the *Ousia*, thereby relegating aesthetics to secondary importance in relation to philosophy. In Shelley, the discourse of Wordsworth and Coleridge becomes a literalised discourse, and Shelley formulates a second-order chain of signification based upon this discourse he inherits from his predecessors. Like Hegel, Shelley realises that there is a need to extricate oneself from this particularised language game. Hegel extricates himself by utilising the discourse of speculative philosophy; Shelley in turn builds a second-order discourse out of the newly codified romantic discourse initiated by Wordsworth and Coleridge; or put

another way, works within the parameters of the same language game. Within these parameters however, there is no possibility of transcendence to a higher third, no triadic movement into a higher *Gestalt*. Shelley therefore decides, after exploring the discourse of his predecessors in “Mont Blanc” and “Alastor” and after his anagogical exposition on Keats’ death in “Adonais”, to submit to the *negative forms of non-knowing*, or the dialectical breakdown of “The Triumph of Life.” Shelley’s dialectical breakdown is hugely significant in terms of the contingent freedom of modern liberalism. This breakthrough signifies the movement away from the original metaphysical meta-narratives of English Romanticism (still available in the language games of idealist philosophy), and the turn towards alternative forms of world disclosure—now conceived as historically contingent, and our human position as therefore *relative* and *ironic*.

To summarise this, we can turn back to Rush’s point cited in Chapter One, that Hegel’s dialectic is closed and historical and Schlegel’s is historical and open. Schlegel is in fact the halfway house between Hegel and Shelley because he privileges aesthetics over philosophy, but whilst so doing remains within the *same language game* as Hegel. However, Shelley turns out to be thoroughly anti-dialectical in “The Triumph of Life.” His *ironist* language game is completely of a different order to that of Hegel. Shelley’s work acts in a deictic fashion by illuminating the fact that aesthetics can give us an alternative conception of reality, without the dialectical processes of speculative-idealist philosophy. Rorty defines the difference of the liberal ironist (Shelley) and the metaphysician (Hegel) thus:

For she (the ironist) cannot offer the same sort of social hope as metaphysicians offer. She cannot claim that adopting her redescription of yourself or your situation makes you better able to conquer the forces which are marshalled against you. On her account, that ability is a matter of weapons and luck, not a matter of having truth on your side, or having detected the “movement of history.”¹⁶

The metaphysical liberalism of Hegel, Wordsworth and Coleridge is a searching for ultimate, transcendental truths, and each of these romantic thinkers reaches different conclusions. Shelley on the other hand realises, as a *liberal ironist*, that there are various new vocabularies always either immanently available or potentially available, through which we can expand our awareness as a modern liberal culture. The hope sought by Rousseau, and anticipated in Shelley-the poet by his experience with Rousseau, is something exhausted by the time the narrative of the poem has played itself out. The post-romantic awareness of an *ironism* premised upon contingency and historicity is brought to bear upon Shelley's own metaphysical hopes, which he inherited from a discourse initiated by Wordsworth and Coleridge.

There has been a lot made of Shelley's proto-poststructuralism in recent years, especially since the work of de Man.¹⁷ Ulmer has written of the poststructuralist bent in Shelley's work:

His poetry envisions an ideal and originary ground of being, and its quest for this ontologically higher ground resists recognising it as an effect of language, a kind of textual mirage.¹⁸

Although poststructuralist analysis is useful in approaching Shelley's work, I feel it is a gross error to reduce his serious engagement with an "originary ground of being" to "a kind of textual mirage." Shelley's engagement leads to a much more tangible recognition of deeper philosophic truths than poststructuralist thinkers like Ulmer often give him credit for—truths that certainly run deeper than mere "textual" difference. In reading "The Triumph of Life" in hermeneutical-phenomenological terms, I would like to argue that Shelley gains a final insight into the nature of experience that points towards a post-romantic acceptance of the contingent nature of our experience. This in effect means a cognitive-recognition of our historicity, and our "ironic" situatedness-in-the-world with regards to the perception of romantic

*deworlde*d subjectivity. What appears in terms of Romanticism, as a visionary failure, can actually indicate a higher awareness of a coming post-metaphysical age. The recognition of the limits of subjectivity, and the ironic opacity of the *photological* experience point the way towards this new phenomenological awareness of Being. Malpas speaks of the “doubling” nature of the experience of light and wonder as adumbrated (using the work of Levinas) in the previous chapter. He claims this seemingly transparent experience, which commences in “wonder” leads to a correspondent opacity that teaches us, as it perhaps *would have taught Shelley, had he completed* “The Triumph of Life,” the true nature of our ontological situation. Malpas writes:

Plato’s association of wonder with the rainbow, and Levinas’ treatment of wonder as like the experience of light, both suggest a conception of wonder as associated with visibility and *transparency*. Yet inasmuch as wonder is also associated with the inexplicable fact of our situatedness, so it is bound up, not merely with transparency, but also with a certain failure of transparency, with a certain *opacity*. In wonder, our “being there” is suddenly “lit up,” and yet in being illuminated, it is also shown as essentially dark—while we can “see into” the intricacies of the world and our situation in it, that there is a world, and that we are already given over to it, is absolutely impenetrable. Our “being there,” our situatedness, on the basis of which the transparency of encounter and of appearance is possible, cannot itself be made transparent, and thus, inasmuch as light is “doubled up” with sight, as that which is “doubled up” with the appearing, so also is transparency “doubled up” with opacity.¹⁹

From this sense of “doubling up” between light and opacity, which Shelley uses as a formative paradox in his poem, we also see the impenetrability of the world in “The Triumph of Life.” This is of course the sense of wonder that pervades the poem, and the reason for the post-romantic tone in the poem; what we can also loosely term “romantic irony”—the sense of an unattainable infinity within the scope of the aesthetic product itself. This observation further points towards an actual *aesthetic recognition* for the poet through his experience as represented in his work. The

recognition is an *ironic recognition*—and a particularly un-Hegelian form of recognition— however a positive recognition of his place in the universe, through his *acknowledgement of negative forms of knowing*. The poet realises his historically contingent place in the universe, and his absorption into this world through an ironic sense of recognition of our own ontological and epistemological limits. This is in turn a post-romantic conception, or at least another discourse of Romanticism, further explored by Shelley’s wife, Mary, in her novel *Frankenstein*, to which I will now finally turn.

4. Embodied Scepticism: *Frankenstein*

Up until this point I have outlined and assessed the tensions within the romantic discourse developed by Wordsworth and Coleridge and the doubt encountered in the construction of this vocabulary, not only by Coleridge but also by Wordsworth. I have also assessed Shelley’s response to this literalised vocabulary and his development of a second-order vocabulary that eventually led to the *ironism* of “The Triumph of Life.” This was an *ironism* that stemmed from his *sceptical idealism*, and was the eventual outcome of the collapse of Shelley’s faith in metaphysics. In her novel *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley explicitly presents a story that functions as a didactic cautionary tale about the misuse of science; however, implicitly the novel encapsulates the romantic irony captured by P.B. Shelley by allegorising the dreams of the romantic poet in the deeds of the romantic scientist, Victor Frankenstein. The wider implication of this dual functionality of the novel is that Mary Shelley explicitly places aesthetics in a higher position than discursive philosophy, and thus reverses Hegel’s topography of aesthetics and philosophy.

A recurrent leitmotif throughout the novel is P.B. Shelley’s question in “On Life” about penetrating “the mystery of our being.” P.B. Shelley refers to the inability of

language (and therefore of romantic codes) to accomplish this task. Mary Shelley displaces this into the scientism of Victor Frankenstein, and by extension the expeditionary hopes of Captain Walton. The connection to the predicament of Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* is explored by Mary Shelley herself both in her direct allusion to the poem in the text²⁰ and to Walton's own allusion to the poem:

I am going to unexplored regions to 'the land of mist and snow'; but I shall kill no albatross, therefore do not be alarmed for my safety, or if I should come back to you as worn and woeful as the 'Ancient Mariner'. You will smile at my allusion; but I will disclose a secret. I have often attributed my attachment to, my passionate enthusiasm for, the dangerous mysteries of the ocean, to that production of the most imaginative of modern poets. There is something at work in my soul, which I do not understand. I am practically industrious—painstaking; a workman to execute with perseverance and labour:—but besides this, there is a love for the marvellous, a belief in the marvellous, intertwined in all my projects, which hurries me out of the common pathways of men, even to the wild sea and uninvited regions I am about to explore.²¹

Walton also compares himself explicitly to a romantic poet, and further implies that his vocation as an explorer arises from his failure as a poet:

I also became a poet, and for one year lived in a Paradise of my own creation; I imagined that I also might obtain a niche in the temple where the names of Homer and Shakespeare are consecrated. You are well acquainted with my failure, and how heavily I bore the disappointment. But just at that time I inherited the fortune of my cousin, and my thoughts were turned into the channel of their earlier bent.²²

Walton signifies the displacement of the romantic poet into the realm of physical exploration; the hopes of the English Romantics are embodied in Walton's expeditionary hopes; and his final aporia represents equally the aporias and ironies explored and experienced by the romantic poets. The romantic poet is therefore displaced in Mary Shelley's feminist poetics into the arctic explorer and *a fortiori* by the framing device, the romantic scientist, both romantic archetypes of the solitary individual whom takes his place outside of society. Moreover, in attempting to

traverse the philosophical, poetic and scientific bounds these thinkers inversely *place themselves* outside of society, creating personal alienation and anomie.

This sense of alienation from the world paradoxically stems from an initial eagerness on Victor's part to understand nature more deeply. But rather than being concerned with the aesthetic appreciation of nature, the Wordsworthian organic sense in which the poet absorbs nature into the overall *Idea*, Victor attempts to apply the inorganic to the organic; he wishes to apply the mechanical tools of the understanding to the organic realm of nature. Thus, instead of finding organic and aesthetic recognition of himself *within* nature, Victor alienates himself from nature in attempting to become master *over* nature. In effect, Victor attempts to enslave nature and from the outset finds no recognition. Early on in the novel, in comparing himself to Elizabeth, Victor claims:

While my companion contemplated with a serious and satisfied spirit the magnificent appearances of things, I delighted in investigating their causes. The world was to me a secret which I desired to divine. Curiosity, earnest research to learn the hidden laws of nature, gladness akin to rapture, as they were unfolded to me, are amongst the earliest sensations I can remember.²³

Victor realises that in Elizabeth there resides a Wordsworthian appreciation of nature itself but for him this will not suffice. Whilst Elizabeth is satisfied with the appearances of the phenomenal world as exhibited in nature, Victor wishes to penetrate into the *noumenal* world. This is a situation that can be compared to Cavell's reading of Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* and the Mariner's desire to penetrate beyond scepticism, and beyond the world of appearances. He attempts this through a sort of philosophical disembodiment from the phenomenal world of appearance, and through this to initially deny his social (and at a higher level linguistic) connection with others. This is the situation that leads to the isolation of the romantic hero such as Victor or the Mariner. Cavell writes:

I note here merely that “being driven to deny my agreement or attunement in criteria” is my lingo for being driven to deny my internal, or natural, connection with others, with the social as such. As if my reaction to the discovery of my separateness is to perpetuate it, radicalize it, interpreting finitude as a punishment, and converting the punishment into self-punishment.[...]Hence the poet may have cause to fear that his art is as fatal as science’s; more fatal, because he had hoped to overcome (what has appeared to the likes of him as) science’s or the intellect’s murdering to dissect; whereas now he finds that he has murdered to connect, to stuff nature into his words, to make poems of it, which no further power can overcome, or nothing further in the way of power.²⁴

In going beyond the line of philosophical scepticism, or in attempting to access the *noumenal* world, Victor has himself been driven to deny his “internal, or natural connection with others, with the social as such.” This is further a “self-punishment” that results in the most extreme breaking of bonds with the natural or phenomenal world of appearances, and it commences with the breaking of his filial ties. As the Mariner, on Cavell’s reading and upon mine, is never fully reintegrated into society, but lives to tell his cautionary tale to others, so does Victor.²⁵ As the poet manages “to stuff nature into his words, to make poems of it, which no further power can overcome, or nothing further in the way of power”, so Victor as the romantic poet/scientist manages to “stuff nature” into his own poem, a corporeal poem which certainly no “further power can overcome.” Cantor emphasises this allegorical aspect of the story:

Frankenstein is not simply an example of Romantic myth; it is also on the deepest level of interpretation a myth about Romanticism, a mythic dramatization of the dangers of an unbridled idealism. At first sight, *Frankenstein* seems to provide a clear case of a Romantic creation myth, since its explicit theme is remaking man. The scientist becomes a metaphor for the poet—Frankenstein’s physical attempt to reconstruct the human frame serves as an image for the goal of Romantic artists: the spiritual regeneration of man.²⁶

The spiritual goal of the romantic poet is embodied in Victor’s creation of the creature out of body parts: a sort of corporeal formalism. Indeed, not only is it a

myth about Romanticism, but an embodiment of the romantic ideal and its aporetic disclosures. This “stuffing” of nature into the corporeal formalism of Mary Shelley’s moral tale results in a recognition once again of the contingency of man’s existence, and the limits of our knowledge. Mary Shelley has, as an artist, overcome science’s “murdering to dissect” as Cavell has it, in that her book self-consciously critiques the limits of scientism. However, at the figurative level Shelley is also critiquing the further limits of the romantic artist who has himself attempted to overcome the fatality of scientism only to discover his own aporetic fatalism. Poovey claims of Mary Shelley’s attitude to English Romanticism in general:

[Mary] Shelley explodes the foundations of Romantic optimism by demonstrating that the egotistical energies necessary to self-assertion—energies that appear to her at the heart of the Romantic model of the imagination—inevitably imperil the self-denying energies of love. To accommodate this reservation, which implicitly indicts all artistic endeavors as well as more insidious forms of egotism. [...] But besides the beneficial results imagined by Coleridge, Wordsworth, Byron, and Percy Shelley, the gifts Mary Shelley’s “modern Prometheus” brings threaten to destroy society and the blasphemous artist as well.²⁷

This destructive element within the Frankenstein story is result not simply of Victor’s overreaching, but also of his romantic fantasy of imaginative disembodiment, the ultimate example of egotism. The self-denying, and recognitive elements of humanity that Victor fails to acknowledge in his disembodied egotism eventually return to haunt him.

In his rejection of nature, and through his hubristic scientism, Victor sets in play a series of events that in effect depict an anti-recognitive state of being—a state of being whereby the romantic anti-hero becomes alienated from all forms of receptivity to the world; starting with the natural world and *a fortiori* extending to his own familial links:

The summer months passed whilst I was thus engaged, heart and soul, in one pursuit. [On the creation of the creature.] It was a most beautiful season; never did the fields bestow a more plentiful harvest or the vines yield a more luxuriant vintage: but my eyes were insensible to the charms of nature. And the same feelings which made me neglect the scenes around me caused me also to forget those friends who were so many miles absent, and whom I had not seen for so long a time.²⁸

Only when Victor returns from the nightmare of his creation of the creature, after he recovers from his mental breakdown, does he start to feel the anodyne effect of organic nature and rediscover his connection to the natural world:

It was a divine spring, and the season contributed greatly to my convalescence. I felt also sentiments of joy and affection revive in my bosom; my gloom disappeared, and in a short time I became as cheerful as before I was attacked by the fatal passion.²⁹

The restorative effects of organic nature temporarily revive Victor, however *Frankenstein* is a tragedy and Victor's *hamartia* and act of *hubris*, or his unrecognitive transgression have already set the wheel of fortune in motion. Victor, in the same fashion as the Mariner, having returned from a region beyond the romantic lines of scepticism, now has to complete his tale and recount to his own guest, Walton, the rest of his experience.

The rejection of a recognitive relationship with nature is also commented on by Poovey:

The course of Frankenstein's decline suggests, in fact, that in the absence of social regulation the formation of the ego is primarily influenced by the imagination's longing to deny fundamental human limitations—in particular the body's determinate bondage to nature and to death. Frankenstein "penetrate[s] into the recesses of nature" in search of the secret life, but what he discovers in the "vaults and charnel houses" is the "natural decay and corruption of the human body."³⁰

Victor's transgression of his bodily limitations, of his inherent embodiment within the natural world, which is also his non-recognition of his self as part of the organic world at large, has in fact led to his fantasy of disembodiment. This hubristic fantasy

however paradoxically leads Victor back to the “natural decay and corruption of the human body.” The lack of “social regulation” and the recognitive structures of the social world, on top of a lack of recognition in the natural world, have also led Victor to this state of alienation and moral turpitude. The paradox is of course that through his un-recognitive transgression he has actually returned to the natural world of embodiment, and like the Mariner, has an even keener sense of our deeper moral connection to the everyday world in which we live. He has a deeper sense of our embodied and organic relationship to the world around us. As Cantor also claims:

Frankenstein wishes that human beings could create life with their minds alone. He is most fundamentally a Romantic in his faith in the power of the imagination to shape a world in accord with man’s dreams and visions, although ironically his attempt to realize his dreams only draws him deeper and deeper into contact with the corrupt material world he is seeking to avoid.³¹

The recognition of Victor is a phenomenological one: his realisation of the limits of humanity and their ability to create a race of “super-beings” coincides with his recognition of his own embodied nature *within* the world which he has been trying to transcend. Although Cantor and Poovey characterise the corporeal world as “corrupt” and “decay and corruption” respectively, Victor *acknowledges* over and above this, his place *within* the organic unity of nature, and his own error in attempting to overreach these embodied limits.

The organicism adumbrated in *Frankenstein* is also of a different nature to that outlined by Beiser, wherein the organicism is teleological, resulting in a combination of Spinozist monism and Leibnizean entelechy. This traditional romantic organicism places man as the *Gnostic* spiritual head of the natural world—as I quoted Beiser in Chapter Three “Since artistic creativity and philosophical contemplation is the highest organization and development of all the powers of

nature, the artist's and the philosopher's awareness of nature is nothing less than the *self-awareness* of nature through the artist and the philosopher." In contrast, *Frankenstein* remains closer to a more exclusively Spinozist organicism in that the protagonist becomes aware of his ignorance of the full powers of the organic universe, and realises his place *within* that universe: his place *within* the natural order. His original attempts to transcend nature through the use of mechanistic principles results in a move away from a quasi-Cartesian view of the universe to a monistic organicism in which he becomes *re-embodied*. Thus, this organicism is also of a different nature to the *Gnostic organicism* depicted by Wordsworth; in Wordsworth's discourse the poet is indeed at the head of the natural world, depicting the "self-awareness" of nature. On the other hand, in Mary Shelley's didactic organicism the poet/scientist/explorer becomes subsumed *within* nature, and as with P.B. Shelley's realisation in "The Triumph of Life," becomes aware of his contingent and historical place within the universe.

The sense of limit and embodiment within the natural world, and the paradoxically didactic outcome of Victor's attempt at romantic transcendence of the natural world, has also been characterised by Cantor in terms of a recognition of our own "creaturely dependence":

The desire to remake man's being until it becomes entirely the product of his own will, or at least to reject a situation not of his own making and choosing, is what is expressed in the gnostic pattern of romantic creation myths. Though they express it in different ways, both the monster and Frankenstein share this attitude. Convinced that only a defective providence denied him happiness, and armed with hard and fast evidence of the limitations of his creator, the monster expresses the Romantic sense of man as a creature. Confident in his ability to remake human nature, Frankenstein expresses the Romantic hope in man as a creator. One of the profound ironies of Mary Shelley's myth is that the visionary creator can only produce a heightened version of human creaturely dependence.³²

This “heightened version of creaturely dependence” is the moral key to the central irony of the novel. On my reading, this is in fact the recognition (or acknowledgment) of man’s receptivity towards the corporeal, the natural and ultimately the social, culminating in a philosophic awareness of man’s place within the universe. The “creaturely dependence” is of course represented clearly in the creature himself. His awareness of dependence on Victor places him in a strange position: he is aware of the limitations of his creator and wishes himself to transcend this “defective providence.” This awareness gives him an ontological understanding unavailable to mortal man: it gives him a physical awareness of the limits and ‘creaturliness’ of his creator, and also supplies his own rejection of the *myth of the fall*. The fall was in fact not his, but his creator’s. His awareness of this gives him the spur to remake himself as it were, to command his own destiny. Metaphysics are removed from the creature’s world, and perhaps one of the other didactic lessons of the novel is the nightmare of a world without metaphysics—a world with permeable and tangible limits that can only lead to an ontological hell. This is the hell suffered by the creature in the novel. Of course, the hell is a result of the fact that the creature is unable to find any form of recognition in a world from which he feels permanently alienated—the will-to-self-creation ultimately results in an ontological insecurity, which is inexorable. The creature is ultimately autonomous—and ultimately destroyed by this autonomy, which is meaningless without the recognition of self in society, in nature, or in another subject. We all require receptivity to the world at large, and without this one’s autonomy becomes vacuous.

As Poovey also claims of the creature’s experience of the world:

For the monster, self-consciousness comes with brutal speed, for recognition depends not on an act of transgression but only on literal self-perception. An old man’s terror, a pool of water, a child’s fear are all nature’s mirrors, returning the monster repeatedly to its

grotesque self, “a figure hideously deformed and loathsome...a monster, a blot upon the earth.”³³

There is no sense of recognition for the creature, either in the sense of *Anerkennung* or of cognitive recognition—no recognition is available either socially or within the organic universe at large. This is the result of autonomy from both metaphysics and the natural world. His only recognition is one of “literal self-perception” and this, in Hegel’s sense, is no recognition at all.

This lack of recognition is further the reason for the master slave relationship that develops between creator and creature, the oscillation between pursuing and being pursued and the life-death struggle that finally takes place between the creature and creator. The asymmetrical relationship, and the lack of recognition, lead to a progressively more destructive narrative pattern; in one sense Mary Shelley reverses the Hegelian pattern of *Anerkennung* as described in *The Phenomenology*: the creature seeks recognition in its creator at its birth and finds none; the incident with the de Lacey’s, the villagers and the young girl compound this failure of recognition. Consequently, the master-slave dialectic is entered into between the two characters. When the creature confronts Victor after Victor has destroyed his bride to be (and his only actual hope of any form of recognition) he treats Victor with all the malice compounded by his ontological insecurity:

“Slave, I before reasoned with you, but you have proved yourself unworthy of my condescension. Remember that I have power; you believe yourself miserable, but I can make you so wretched that the light of day will be hateful you. You are my creator, but I am your master; - obey!”³⁴

The creature and Victor are heading in an aetiological direction, moving away from any sense of recognition towards the situation of the life-death struggle, where both will perish in the North Pole at the end of the book. The “light of day” is potentially a horror in *Frankenstein*, because as the creature experiences it, there is no sense of

wonder. Our philosophical beginnings in wonder are what make us human, and this *wonder* is at the root of our need for recognition within the world at large. This wonder is not available to the creature, as it has been taken away by his fallen creator: Victor. “Creaturely” human dependence is recognition, and without recognition one’s autonomy is meaningless. In fact, one becomes ultimately self-destructive without the receptivity and recognition required in order for us to fully understand (or cognise) our own autonomy.

The creature also displaces his own potential for autonomous imaginative vision into his creator, and in this sense also *loses* his autonomy. Humankind has to bridge the gap between its existence and essence, and due to this ontological anguish authentically create itself anew. In contrast, the creature does not have this gap—it is bridged by his knowledge of Victor as his fallen creator. The creature is in the strange ontic position of being an object with a consciousness, but no hidden or ineffable essence. In this sense the creature is living his imaginative vision vicariously through his creator, and his *own* corporeal poem, his wife, has to be created likewise by his creator. Therefore the creature, because of his alienation from the organic world, does not actually possess the gift of *autonomous imagination*, which is only available to humans within a *fully recognitive* relationship with the world. Victor, on the other hand, starts out with an apparently autonomous vision, whereby he can live the romantic creation myth, and in the process recognises not only his own need for receptivity to the organic world, but also the moral limitations of romantic creation mythology. All of these factors reflect the deeper philosophical workings of Mary Shelley’s cautionary tale, and her own reaction to the Romanticism being explored in the discourse of Wordsworth and Coleridge. Her own reflections are *also* however carried out in the medium of

art, and Mary Shelley places our special organic relationship to nature in sharp contrast to the mechanism of scientism. In so doing she also figuratively depicts the struggles for *aesthetic recognition* of these poets, and the embodied limits of their own particular visionary yearnings. She presents this through her own representation of the need and struggle for recognition that permeates our human existence.

Mary Shelley reverses the tripartite model employed by Hegel in which philosophy is in a position higher than aesthetics and religion in its apprehension of *the concrete universal*, and shows the moral utility of aesthetics in its place in acting in a regulatory and didactic fashion. She accomplishes this in her novel by illustrating the limits not only of romantic aesthetics but also of scientism and romantic philosophy. The novel works on a literal level in its didactic refutation of the possible hubristic pretensions of scientism, but also on a figurative and allegorical level in its analysis of a particular discourse of English Romanticism. This self-consciousness can only be attained in aesthetics, and Mary Shelley therefore uses her novel in order to depict these epistemic limitations. The central aspect to Mary Shelley's story is recognition (both social and cognitive) and the tragic effect of a breakdown of recognition, both in the social and natural world.

Wordsworth gains an organic unity that is of a different nature to the organicism envisioned by Mary Shelley—hers is an organicism that reflects our place *within* a predisposed natural order, not as the *Gnostic spirit-head* of a teleological organicism. As such, even though she references at various points in the story the Wordsworthian conceptualisation of nature, she ultimately sets the story against the sublime mountains of the Alps, referencing the same “mysterious doubt” countenanced by her husband, and sets the beginning and the end of the story within the arctic climes of the North Pole. This serves to remind the reader of our place

within an immutable universe and a natural world of which we are *not* the *Gnostic* head. Victor invites tragedy by playing hubristically with nature's immutable laws, and Walton backs down in the face of the immutable arctic wastes. The fact that that the story employs a framing device, of which the locale of the first narrative of Walton is set within the frozen wastes further adds to the sense of the overall sublime immutability of the organic and ubiquitous, natural world. The removal of a romantic and organic teleology is also at the heart of *Frankenstein*, and is an echo of the Shelleyan conception of the sublime outlined in "Mont Blanc."

These overall limits of certain discourses of Romanticism, recognised in second-order romantic discourses of writers such as P.B. and Mary Shelley beckon in a new acknowledgment of aesthetics as best representing our limited conception of the world at large. Borgmann writes of a need in modernity to rediscover a *moral cosmology*, of the kind discussed by the ancients such as Aristotle. He argues that thinkers such as Goethe, Kant and Schelling have all attempted this holistic enterprise with varying degrees of success (we can also add Hegel to this list). Art needs to attend to nature, and perhaps help form a moral reflection of the universe that can be combined interdependently with our scientific view of the natural world. Borgmann writes:

The interdependent complement of a law of nature is the insistence that constrains the law to yield the description and explanation of a state of affairs or an event. Newton's laws of motion merely outline a possible space. They describe an actual world when we insert the values of, for example, the solar system in place of the variables for mass, acceleration, distance, etc. Among the greatest of instantiations are works of art. They are the most eminent compliments to laws. They are instances of high contingency—unpredictable and unprocurable and, in that sense, free. So are the nuisances of life and the results of throwing dice. But these are part of the low contingency of everyday reality. Works of art rise above and lend orientation to the plains of normalcy.³⁵

For Borgmann, there needs to be a modern rapprochement of the mechanical laws of science and the living and contingent force of the world in which we live. Borgmann believes in the romantic attempt to combine Goethean “presence” (the contingent view of immanent reality) with Kant’s sense of *nomos*. This is another way of extending Schelling’s 1803 conception of art as an example of the *natura naturans*, and thereby a representation of the essential vitalism of the universe. In *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley attempts to challenge the scientific attempts at discovering the “hidden laws of nature” and also its attempt to debunk Borgmann’s and Schelling’s aestheticism by giving the scientist privileged access to the *natura naturans*. For Mary Shelley the work of art concretely represents this moral cosmology; it acts in a didactic fashion in demonstrating the limits of science itself to *fully appreciate a moral cosmology*. The novel’s morality consists in returning us to a state of *organicism* through an *aesthetic recognition* that Victor originally chooses to ignore. He regains access to a truly Spinozist *natura naturans* but this moral reconciliation happens too late. The important fact is that the work of art stands as the ultimate signifier of a moral cosmology. It further teaches us of a moral cosmology wherein there is a requirement of human receptivity in order to partake in the overall organic system of which we are a part. This law, if transgressed, leads to the alienation and horror of Victor and his creature. The contingency of our place *within* this cosmology can only be represented by self-conscious works of art such as *Frankenstein*, which illuminate the lawful limits to our contingent place in the universe.

5. Conclusion

I would finally like to discuss how the relation Hegel envisages between philosophy, religion and art is reversed if we consider art, in particular poetry, in light of the

concept of *aesthetic recognition*. In my discussion of English Romanticism I sought to show how different poets, in certain canonical poems conceived and expressed their relationship to the problem of *deworloded subjectivity*. I developed the idea of *deworloded subjectivity* with reference to post-Kantian German thought and by extension a number of English romantic poets. In particular, and fully acknowledging Hegel's own criticism of romantic thought, I identified Hegel's teleological organicism as the *ultimate* example of romantic narrative, or romantic mythology. This is because this is a teleological, or what one could label romantic mythology—that is, a story that attempts to re-integrate the human subject into the natural world whilst at the same time retaining a sense of autonomous subjectivity. Using Hegel's social form of recognition, *Anerkennung*, and introducing a broader notion of cognitive recognition, I sought to develop a notion of what I called *aesthetic recognition*. The concept refers to an aesthetic struggle whereby the poet seeks to deal with the issue of *deworloded subjectivity*, by virtue of attempting to reintegrate himself through his poetry into a unified conception of the world. On the argument presented here, a significant shift in this struggle for *aesthetic recognition* has taken place by the time of P.B. Shelley's final poem and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. This is due to the fact that in "The Triumph of Life" there is an aesthetic recognition of the historicity, contingency and ultimately ironic nature of our experience of the world. Moreover, in Mary Shelley's novel we see expressed the aporetic character of Romanticism, and a dramatisation of its hopes, conflicts and disappointments.

Notes

1. Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 32.
2. Cavell, p. 74.
3. Cavell writes of Coleridge's treatment of Wordsworth's incipient animism in the phrase "communicating with objects" thus: "Coleridge will not allow Wordsworth to mean much, if anything, coherent by that phrase. In volume 2, chapter 17 of the *Biographia* he says, criticizing Wordsworth's preface: 'If to communicate with an object implies an acquaintance with it, as renders it capable of being discriminately reflected on; the distinct knowledge of an uneducated rustic would furnish a very scanty vocabulary.' This wilfully takes Wordsworth to be praising the rustic's knowledge, say, of the paths through his woods, as superior to, *and in the same line as*, the knowledge that surveyors and cartographers could acquire of them. Not only does this refuse to interpret the preposition "with," pretending that what Wordsworth likes in his rustics is their ability to discourse in endless monologues about their belongings and neighbourhood, as though they were veritable and boring Coleridges; but it perversely turns a deaf ear to Wordsworth's evident wish to speak of the kind of knowledge that is, let us say, wordless." Cavell, pp. 71-72.
4. Cavell, p. 72.
5. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 128.
6. Tilottama Rajan, "Displacing Post-Structuralism: Romantic Studies After Paul de Man," *Studies in Romanticism*, 24:4 (1985: Winter), p. 455.
7. Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 170.
8. Rajan, p. 454.
9. Merleau-Ponty, p. 146.
10. Spencer Hall, "Wordsworth's 'Lucy' Poems: Context and Meaning" *Studies in Romanticism*, 10:3 (1971: Summer), p. 159. Hall states that "I shall argue that the meaning of these poems lies neither in despairing irony nor pantheistic affirmation, but in a humanism which borders on the tragic and whose implications are broadly relevant to an understanding of Wordsworth's poetic development."
11. Hall, p. 170.
12. This sense of dialectic of a "pantheistic affirmation" on the one hand and "despairing irony" on the other is essentially the debate between Mellor and de Man on the subject of allegory and symbol that I discussed in Chapter Two when addressing Coleridge's theory of the symbol in relation to his overall poetic enterprise, and as exhibited in "Kubla Khan." Both discuss "A Slumber Did my Spirit Seal" in terms of this debate and de Man reads the poem as being Wordsworth's poetic affirmation of the ironic distance between his experience and the linguistic rendering of that experience.
13. Rorty himself, in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), claims of the issue of utilising the Wittgensteinian tools in order to formulate one's own language "This Wittgensteinian analogy between vocabularies and tools has one obvious drawback. The craftsman typically knows what job he has to do before picking or inventing the tools with which to do it. By contrast. Someone like Galileo, Yeats, or

even Hegel (a “poet” in my wide sense of the term—the sense of “one who makes things new”) is typically unable to make clear exactly what he wants to do before developing the language in which he succeeds in doing it.” pp. 12-13.

14. Rorty, p. 53.
15. Rorty, p. 7.
16. Rorty, p. 91.
17. For an excellent discussion see Spencer Hall, “Review: The Ideal, The Rhetorical and The Erotic: A Poststructuralist P.B. Shelley,” *College English*, Vol. 54, No.6, Oct., 1992, pp. 721-728.
18. William A. Ulmer, *Shelleyan Eros: The Rhetoric of Romantic Love* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 18.
19. Jeff Malpas, “Beginning in Wonder: Placing the origin of thinking,” in Nikolas Kompridis (ed.) *Philosophical Romanticism* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 291.
20. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein Or the Modern Prometheus* (London: Penguin Classics, 1992), p. 58.
21. *Frankenstein*, pp. 19-20.
22. *Frankenstein*, pp. 14-15.
23. *Frankenstein*, p. 36.
24. Cavell, p. 60.
25. On Cavell’s philosophical reading of the poem the sense of not being able to re-cross the line is a positive element however. Cavell claims of the mariner in relation to ‘ordinary’ inhabitants of the world: “To bring them back from their concealed life-in-death, accordingly, the Mariner has to break into their adjustments to become a disturber of their peace. (He recognizes us as living our scepticism, or gives sense to that surmise.)” p. 62. So the Mariner in effect positively recovers the world to himself, and in so doing is prescribed the penance of forever retelling his tale to the masses who have in effect naturalised the philosophical lines of scepticism in which we live our lives.
26. Paul Cantor, *Creature and Creator: Myth-Making and English Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 108.
27. Mary Poovey, “My hideous Progeny: Mary Shelley and the Feminization of Romanticism,” *PMLA*, vol. 95, No. 3 (May, 1980), pp. 332-33.
28. *Frankenstein*, pp. 53-54.
29. *Frankenstein*, p. 61.
30. Poovey, p. 334.
31. Cantor, p. 113.
32. Cantor, p. 123.
33. Poovey, p. 337.
34. *Frankenstein*, p. 162.
35. Albert Borgmann, “Broken Symmetries: The romantic search for a moral cosmology,” in *Philosophical Romanticism*, pp. 256-57.

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